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THE GOLDEN BOOK OF
ANIMAL STORIES

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PINE MARTEN AND SQUIRREL

Page 70

Frontispiece

THE GOLDEN BOOK OF ANIMAL STORIES



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*To the Boys and Girls
Who gaily pull their sledges up the Hill
For the sake of coasting down,
Who gladly face the morning rain
For the sake of walking home when it is fine,
Who set out to luncheon in the country,
And eat their lunch before they get there,
Who love the Things that crawl,
The Things that grow,
The Things that fly and run,
This Book is Dedicated
By a Little Brother of the Great Outdoors.*

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THE GOLDEN BOOK OF ANIMAL STORIES

NIX

The Tale of a Tame Stoat

When Dan Stalwart went into the granary for some hen corn one morning, he was surprised to find Jane, the pure white tabby, in possession of a family of young stoats. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for creatures within man's keeping to steal each other's children, for a duck has been known to foster an otter cub, a goose to mother young rabbits, a cat to mother goslings, so perhaps, after all, Jane was no startling exception. The change of diet, however, was evidently too much for the little tummies of the fosterlings, and one by one they gave it up till only one was left—the strongest and the biggest of the brood.

This one never looked behind him, and Dan made a habit of handling the kit daily, for his friends had told him that he would never succeed in taming it. So, before the kit's eyes were open, he

accustomed it to the touch of his fingers, and Jane and her sole surviving charge were given a bed in the study.

Immediately the stoat kit obtained its sight things began to move. Ere it was known that its eyes were open, it was found in the early morning to be missing, and forthwith it was concluded that Jane had carried it off. An hour or so later the cook took up an oven pan which was leaning against the kitchen wall, when a snake-like spluttering and hissing reached her ears, and there was the tiny stoat bristling from end to end, and making little frog-like leaps at her hands. Dan was fetched to restore it to its bed, and immediately his fingers closed upon it the little animal's fury subsided.

Jane took to feeding the little stoat on mice, and when she returned with a kill she would utter repeatedly a curious grunting mew as she entered the house, at which the stoat would try to escape from his prison. As Jane appeared, he would snatch the kill from her and shake and worry it with the ferocity of a tiger.

Before very long Jane realized that her growing son required more exercise than he could obtain in the confined quarters of the box, so she took to lifting him out and carrying him to her favourite seat on the geranium bed. Here he would sprawl over his mother as they lay together in the sun, fighting with her tail and dabbing at her ears.

Sometimes too Jane brought Nix in for meals, and he was a source of amusement at such times. He had one favourite humpty which stood in the centre of the dining-room floor, and mounting this, he would pivot round and round, and turn back somersaults at bewildering speed.

As the stoat grew older, however, the household saw less and less of him. Sometimes if they were quiet he would appear miraculously in the dining-room during their evening meal, to perform his lightning twists and turns, but he would disappear just as miraculously on hearing any strange sound. It was an old, rambling house, and Nix was making his home inside the walls. At night-time he could sometimes be heard scuttling hither and thither among the stones and mortar, and he at least did one good thing in getting rid of the rats and mice. Sometimes he was heard pattering across the ceilings, sometimes he was seen on the roof, or whisking along the gutter.

Certainly Nix caused some trouble on one or two occasions. For example, strange noises were repeatedly heard issuing from a disused cupboard, the doors of which had long been screwed up. Out of curiosity Dan finally forced the doors open, whereupon he made an interesting discovery concerning their strange tenant. For Nix had been using the press as a store cupboard, and on the top shelf he had hoarded a strange assortment of oddments. There was a small potato and the

cork of a bottle from the kitchen, a cartridge from the study, a large horn button, several odd items of food probably from the dining-room floor, a walnut, and three dead mice.

So summer and autumn drifted by, and the first snows had fallen when the strangest incident in this strange history brought it to a close.

It had been a still and oppressive day, and it came a silent, foggy night—the kind of night when the treading of a mouse along the gravel walk would sound uncannily loud. The household retired to bed early, and midnight had chimed from the clock on the staircase when Dan was wakened—by what he knew not. He sat rigidly upright, and as he listened, he heard another sound which seemed to echo through all the quiet corridors—a sharp, almost metallic “chip-chip-chip”, as of someone beating two flints together—up and down, growing and fading, and accompanied, so it seemed, by a minute patter of paws.

Quickly Dan got up, lit a candle, and pushed open the bedroom door. The sound ceased, then began again, echoing up the staircase. So far as Dan could make out, Nix, much disturbed at something, was scurrying up and down the dining-room corridor outside the closed door, and it occurred to Dan that an uninvited stranger might have called. Therefore he blew out his candle, possessed himself of his revolver, and tiptoed down.

Dan stood, one hand on the dining-room latch, and then he heard a sound as of padded feet on the carpet. Quickly he raised the latch and threw the door open.

Smoke!—the room was full of smoke, stifling and dense, and towards the fire-place Dan could see a ruddy glow which, even as he stood there, grew in brilliancy. The room was on fire, the air within was already unbreathable, and Dan realized that, fed by the draught from the open door, the smouldering glow within was breaking into flame. Unaided he could do nothing, so he stepped back quickly, closing the door behind him, though ere he did so he saw something white dart between his feet into the smoke-filled room, and again he heard the metallic “chip”.

Men were summoned, water was placed in readiness, and a few minutes later the doors were opened and the fire attacked. It proved not to be so serious a matter after all. An old oak beam, which had probably been smouldering for weeks, had led the sparks to the floor, but a few bucketfuls of water served to divert the forces which, had not Dan been wakened, would doubtless have demolished his home.

It was not till daylight came that the extent of the damage could be explored, and it was then that the strange discovery was made. Under the big humpty lay poor Jane, still so overcome by the smoke that she could not move, and beside

her, ready to fight and protect her, crouched what might have been one of her own kittens. The latter was Nix in his winter coat—Nix in the spotless purity of his ermine robe!

Poor Jane! For thus a prisoner in the room, her appeals were unheard behind the closed door, and in the general rush that followed no one had noticed her. Unheard, I say, but was there not one who had heard her—one to whom she had given life and mother-warmth, and who, hearing, chose to take his place beside her when at length the door was opened?

Thus Dan's strange pet not only saved the house, but first and foremost he saved his dear foster mother.



THE FEAST

A Tale of the Canadian Black Bear

The sea! The black bear cub sat at his big mother's side and stared across the infinite expanse of it. Never before had he beheld the sea, but it was the scent, rather than the sight, which thrilled him with new discovery. He had not been very well of late, and his mother, wise with the wonderful wisdom of such woodland mothers, had brought him here for the medicinal salt which was to dispel that fretful languor, and to bring back the lustre to his coat.

In front was a narrow stretch of sand, strewn with bleached logs, and beyond that a black headland of weed-covered rock, running out half a mile or more. The tide was out, so the mother-bear, knowing the way of the sea, set out at once for the narrow headland. By chance there were no other bears in sight, but others might come, for it was not uncommon for as many as a dozen black bears to assemble about that headland, so the mother-bear was anxious to get in first.

Certainly the cub needed no urging to follow up briskly, for his nostrils told him what was in

store. *En route* for the rocks he discovered a stranded dogfish, and made a grab at it. The dogfish had evidently been stranded some days previously, for it was very much of a *dead* dogfish, but the cub tried to take it with him, in which ambition he failed, because the creature was about ten feet long, though no thicker than a man's arm. Also his mother turned with a grunt and cuffed him, telling him in plainest mother-bear language to leave the nasty thing alone.

The cub was reluctant, and would have made a dash back for his find when his mother's back was turned, but soon he was so deeply engrossed in other things that he forgot all about the dogfish. They had gained the rocks now, each rock heavily draped with weed, and the she-bear set to work lifting and turning each trailing mass, and nosing under it. The wet, quivering nose of the cub followed her every movement, sniffing just where she sniffed, and when a prawn was trapped between mother's wet nose and the wet rock, the cub's long tongue contrived to capture the prawn, and the cub it was who munched it.

That was enough! Never in his life had he tasted anything so delicious! He went half mad with excitement, sniffing everything, snapping at quivering scraps of weed, pushing his big mother about in his eagerness for another prawn. He found a red starfish clinging to the rocks, and it

raised one warning finger at him, and somehow he knew he must not touch the starfish, so he merely growled at it. Had he tried to eat that particular starfish, his tongue would have swollen up, and might have choked him, and at the best the thing would have been tough and unpalatable. But they found more prawns and sand shrimps, and there were many, many little blue and yellow crabs which scuttled broadside from under the weed, and which the cub pounced upon with such energy that more than one was squashed out of sight into the sand. Also there were many varieties of shellfish, which the bears munched whole, then put out the shells, so that the sound of liquid munching and crunching never for a moment ceased. And all the time the mother-bear was hurrying along the headland, lest other bears should come and get in front of her.

But the real thrill was yet ahead, for as the two bears came suddenly upon one of the many small pools among the rocks, each pool a garden of loveliness with its tinted weeds, something churned the water into foam. They saw a large flat fish, striving to bury itself in the sand by strange little quivering undulations of its side fins, but there was insufficient sand on the bed of the pool, and the big fish remained clearly visible.

Out darted a monster padded paw, armed with a terrifying array of fish-hooks, and in an instant the mother-bear sent the fish bouncing and career-

ing over the rocks with both bears in hot pursuit. The cub was a little afraid of it, but the mother pinned it down, and in two minutes there was not a morsel left, save the gills and the tail.

So the delightful experience continued till they were at least two hundred yards from the shore, but by that time the cub's enthusiasm had worn off a little. How much he had eaten I would not like to speculate. The only wonder was that his little tummy could accommodate one-half of it. Now he was as round as a barrel, and even his bright eyes seemed to be bulging, owing to the tightness of his skin. Still he tried to keep pace with his mother, but every few yards he sat down and whined. Another crab, another shrimp, and he was done. He could not even walk now, so he remained sitting, seeming to bulge in every direction, while his mother went on nosing and munching. At that the cub's whines rose to howls. Not another morsel could he hold, he could not even stir, yet there was Mother—still munching!

So busily occupied had both bears been that neither of them had noticed a small rowing-boat drifting idly on the smooth waters of the bay to the north of the headland. In all probability they would not have seen it had they looked, for black bears, like many creatures of the dense bush, are possessed of very indifferent sight. But now the boat was moving rapidly towards them,

and the mother-bear heard the rattle of the rowlocks as the men aboard plied their oars.

As a matter of fact there was only one man, his companion being a boy of about fourteen. They were spending a fishing holiday, and their camp was a mile or so up the coast. They had watched the bears feeding, knowing full well that the cub would very soon become incapable of active movement, and now that that stage was reached, they might have their bit of fun.

"Just watch the mother run, soon as she winds us," observed the man.

"Bet she doesn't leave the cub," stated the boy.

The man laughed with an air of superior knowledge. "You want to get those nursery fables out of your head, sonny," said he. "I tell you there ain't no more cowardly creature in all the woods than the black bear."

Meantime the mother-bear stood stock still, watching. Probably she had never before seen human beings, at any rate approaching across the water. She was merely overcome with curiosity, but presently a helpful gust wafted from them to her.

"Man!" said that gust, and one might have thought that it veritably shrieked it in her ears, for her movements when she caught the fish were slow compared with her movements now. She turned and made a dash for her cub. In her

hurry she fell clean over him, and left him spread out flat, " Kia-wa-waing " at the top of his voice. Thirty paces farther on she seemed to realize that he was not following, so she went back.

" What did I tell you?" cried the boy.

" You wait and see," the man answered.

Reaching her offspring, the mother nosed him on to his legs, but it was much like trying to induce a feather cushion to stand. As a matter of fact I think the cub did not want to stand, so his mother proceeded to nose him ahead of her, sometimes six feet at a time; sometimes he landed right side up, and sometimes wrong.

But the man was anxious to prove his statement that the black bear is the biggest coward in all the woods, so he was pulling hard on the oars so as to get between the bears and the shore. In this he succeeded, and with less than forty feet separating them, the man let forth a ringing shout, and struck the water a resounding smack.

At that the nerves of the mother-bear went to bits, and again she fell over her cub in her head-long dash for safety. But this time she did not go back. She did not even look back. Straight across the stretch of sand she plunged, and head-long into the bush, and long after she had vanished they heard the crashing in the undergrowth.

" What did I tell you?" exclaimed the man with the oars, regarding his young companion triumphantly.



THE MOTHER NOSED HIM ON TO HIS LEGS

The boy looked a shade disappointed. Evidently his opinion of mother-bears had received a bad jolt.

"Well, I never!" he muttered. "She's gone and left him."

"Of course she has," said the other. "Didn't I tell you she would? Now if you want a bear cub, there's one waiting for you."

The boy looked at the cub, still lying whimpering. "Guess he'd scratch some, Dan," said he.

"Not if you handle him rightly. Come ashore and I'll show you."

They beached the boat, the boy leaping barefooted into the water and hauling up the prow. The cub struggled into a sitting position as they approached, then he pulled himself together and staggered towards them. He ran into the boy's legs, at which the boy leapt high with a shout, and next moment the man placed one hand under the cub, and gripped him by the neck with the other hand. A quick jerk, and the cub was tumbled roughly on to the floor of the boat.

"There you are!" said the man boastfully. "That's the way to handle bear cubs!"

But the boy's eyes blazed. "You didn't handle him, you simply chucked him," he said. "See, you've made his nose bleed."

"That ain't nothing," complained the man, wiping his wrist on his canvas trousers.

"What, has he scratched you?"

"Yes, he's scratched me all right," said the man. "Got hold of him too loose."

The boy looked at his companion's wrist. It was streaming blood.

"You want to get some iodine on that," said he. "It's a nasty cut. I've heard of men dying through getting scratched by a bear cub."

A look of fear came into the man's face. He scrambled hurriedly aboard, and pushed off, while the cub tried to hide itself under the anchor chain.

"Let's stop the bleeding," said the boy. He took out his handkerchief, knotted it tightly above the wound, then with his knife tightened the bandage till the man could stand no more. So pre-occupied had they been that neither of them had noticed something moving towards them across the open bay.

The mother-bear had not entirely forgotten her responsibilities, for having reached the timber she circled back, and as she watched, her desperation grew. She dashed across the sands and launched herself, swimming straight for the boat, only her nose and her eyes above the surface.

Now, with an hysterical roar, the mother-bear placed two huge forepaws on the edge of the boat, and proceeded to heave herself clear of the water. Down went the free-board, and the sea poured in. Both men lost their feet. Next moment the boat completely turned turtle, and all were swimming. The boy landed on the sands, the

man on the headland, the bear and her cub on the rocky outcrop. The cub had regained his powers, for he followed at his mother's heels towards the bush at a speed which was surprising.

The boat was half a mile away, drifting rapidly towards the open sea. "Seems we'll have to walk back to camp," observed the man dolefully.

"Yes," agreed the boy. "You and your mother-bears!"

But twenty minutes later the man called over his shoulder with some of his old confidence: "What have I told you many a time—that there ain't never any telling what a bear *will* do? They're the most unaccountable creatures in all the woods."

The boy did not answer, for he was not in a mood to attach special importance to anything Dan said about bears!



GREENCAP THE DRAKE

*There are Good Fathers, as well as Good
Mothers, in the Woods*

It was springtime, and the reeds were peeping in a green shimmer all along the margin of the great lake. In a quiet bay the pair of wild duck had made their home, and just above the gravel margin was a dense entanglement of blackthorn bushes, through which only the little woodland deer knew the way. The bushes nearer the water were densely matted with drift left by previous floods, and it was in the shadow of one of these bushes, on a platform of dry grass, that Greyleaf, the mother wild duck, made her nest. It was close to the ground, and so marvellously screened that only by the keenest watching could one have found it.

Greyleaf guarded her secret closely. Leaving the water she would waddle straight inland to a point beyond her nest, where she would stand for a few seconds watching, then, cautiously, with neck outstretched, she would creep into the wrong bush, pass out in the shadows on the other side, then, making a circuit, return to her nest. When

she left it you would see her flying down the lake to join her husband, Greencap, as though she had come from miles away, and so one by one she laid her eleven greenish, muddy-looking eggs, which so exactly matched the nest that even had you looked straight at them you might not have realized what they were.

There followed many idle days. At dawn and dusk Greyleaf would join her husband out on the open water, to snatch a meal and to duck and toss the silver spray over her shoulders, and Greencap, quacking loudly, would mimic her every movement in his gladness to have her with him for a brief respite.

One day an angler, who was spending his holidays about the lake, beached his boat near to the wild duck's nest. As he went ashore he was startled by a wild duck appearing mysteriously at his very feet, where it seemed there was cover insufficient to hide a mouse. The bird did not fly away, but instead it flapped heavily across the surface of the water, pretending that it was sorely injured, and clearly inviting the man to try to catch it. But the fisherman knew the ways of wild woodland parents, and he knew that the father wild duck was only trying to decoy him away from the place, because the nest was there.

Peering into the bush, he saw what he thought at first was a bit of a man's clothing hitched up among the branches, then he noticed one bright

eye, and he knew that the thing at which he was looking was the mother wild duck sitting on her eggs. So he quietly went his way, while the male bird still tried to lead him on by flapping across the surface, pretending that its wings were broken.

Next day Greyleaf led her nine waddling atoms of duckhood to the water's edge, where Greencap was waiting for them. Out they sailed across the blue waters, starting their strange, mysterious lives, the little ducklings huddled so closely behind their mother as they swam that you could have covered the whole brood with a dinner plate; and following immediately behind them was their father, Greencap.

So for an hour the drake kept his wife and family company, but, strange to record, a change was coming over Greencap, and he seemed to think that his presence with his brood could do them no good. As a matter of fact his name "Greencap" was no longer appropriate, for his head was losing its brilliant shades; the dazzling shot lights were gone, and in place of the lustrous blue and green, his headgear was now becoming a dull brown. So also had the gorgeous marking of his wings faded, and day by day he was acquiring a coat exactly resembling the dead leaf shades of his wife. Thus when it would seem that his watchfulness and help were most needed, when two pairs of eyes rather than one pair would have

meant so much to the welfare of the brood, Fate had decided that Greencap should fall foul of that period which is so trying for all wild birds, wild ducks in particular—the moult.

Greencap was shedding his feathers, and feeling decidedly off colour he crept into the rushes, and there for many days he hid. He required little food, but merely sat and moped, while his wife looked after the ducklings far out on the glistening sheet of water. She had many enemies, but she had to guard against them alone and unaided, for poor Greencap had now shed his wing feathers and could not even fly. Among their worst enemies were a pair of great black-backed gulls, which were forever wheeling over the lake. Very beautiful these gulls looked as they flashed silver and pink in the sunlight, but at heart they were real robbers, and had one of Greyleaf's ducklings strayed from her side, the big gulls would instantly have swooped down and swallowed it. So, to avoid the gulls, Greyleaf kept her little brood in the rushes, where they were hidden from view, but even here deadly foes were lurking. The weather was hot, and the big pike had taken to lying in the shallow water among the rushes, and under shelter of the roots. They perhaps were deadlier foes than the great gulls, because one could not see them. There was just a swirl and a snap in the shallow water, and a little duckling was gone. So at the end of the

first week poor Greyleaf had only six ducklings following her, instead of nine.

One day a gale sprang up from the north-west, and the white horses ran with streaming manes across the blue expanse of water. So rough the lake became that the ducklings were in danger of being swamped and drowned, so Greyleaf led them through the dense thorn thicket where they were born, and into the daffodil swamps which lay beyond. While the gale lasted they made their home there, and a safe and sheltered haven it proved, for here there were no pike and no black-backed gulls.

I do not know when Greyleaf and her ducklings rested. The silver dawn, the crimson sunset, the flood of the summer moon, the heat of midday, always seemed to find them drifting hither and thither about the great lake now that the wind had dropped, and so they came to know the old angler who spent his days in the boat, and would even take food from the surface when he threw it to them.

One pink and silver sunrise the fisherman saw something which he would never forget. The air was chilly, as Scottish dawns are, but there was not a cloud in the sky, not a ripple on the wide loch. Everywhere sounded the grunting and squealing of the coots and dabchicks, while in the alders and birch groves the grey-hens were craning their necks to pick the buds and the

catkins. But suddenly there was a shudder of fear all along the lake margin, like the shudder of the wind in the aspens. The dabchicks submerged save for their conning towers, the coots banded together, the heron standing at the point squatted flat in the shallow water, for overhead there sounded a savage "kee", the scream of a mighty bird of prey. It was a peregrine falcon, and now, like a thunderbolt, he came down from the clouds, striking the water with a fury that cast high a million sparkling jewels. He had struck at a train of half-fledged ducklings following their mother, but ere he touched the water every one of them had dived. Their mother, however, did not dive. Her name was Greyleaf, and the fisherman saw her flapping across the surface of the water, pretending that her wing was broken, and doing her very best to attract the falcon's attention so that he would leave her children alone, and she succeeded. For, with a scream, the big hawk swerved and went straight at her in a dazzling stoop. Just in the ace of time she dived, and again he struck only the empty water, but in a moment she was up and he was after her sweeping across the surface and striving, it would seem, to strike her head as he zipped through the air.

So the fisherman watched, and all his sympathies were with the heroic mother, trying to save her little brood. Fierce and intent, the falcon

would not leave her. He hung round on vibrating wings, and every time Greyleaf appeared above the surface, he would lash at her, and down she would pop again. For the falcon knew what he was doing. Slowly but surely he was drowning Greyleaf. Before long she would have to get up and fly for her life, because her lungs were giving out, and this was just what the falcon was waiting for. When she rose he would strike her down and bear her off.

So it seemed that the incident could have but one ending, for Greyleaf was clearly failing. Then the man saw another wild duck coming across the morning air in staggering, stumbling flight. It seemed scarcely able to keep itself a-wing, and as it drew nearer the fisherman saw that its flight feathers were



AGAIN HE STRUCK ONLY THE EMPTY WATER

only half formed, and that it was only just able to fly.

Yet, handicapped though he was, Greencap's courage never wavered. Straight at the mighty hawk he flew, and as it stooped to strike a final blow at the exhausted Greyleaf, her husband met the falcon in mid-air. There was a thud and a cloud of feathers, and Greencap and the bird of prey fell headlong into the water. The duck did not mind this, and merely rested on the surface, quacking loudly and defiantly, but the hawk could not swim. He was down and out, his gorgeous wings were wet, and now he could do no more than flap-flap-flap across the surface to the pebbly beach. He gained it at length, and sat there very wet and wretched-looking, while out on the lake Greencap and his mate swam round and round their little brood, quacking triumphantly. So the wild ducks won in the end.



THE FOSTER CUB

The Pet Badger which had to Go

Palmer Crow was returning home in the dusk of evening when he heard a sound which, despite his forty-five years' familiarity with the forest folk, he did not recognize. It came from the dense shadows of the larches away on his left—as of someone rubbing with finger-tips upon a wet pane of glass, and as he stopped to listen he distinguished also a rustling of little feet over the pine needles. Then from the shadows there emerged a little jogging bundle, for all the world like a tiny bear cub, save for the white bands along its face, by which he instantly knew it. Straight up to Palmer's feet it came, colliding with his boots, which evidently it mistook for its lost mother, for its cries of distress gave way to sounds of contentment. It was a badger cub, so young as scarcely to have its eyes open.

Now, though Crow had lived all his life in the heart of the badger forests, this was actually the first time he had seen a wild badger alive and free, for so secretive are these strange folk in their ways that for the most part it is possible to know

them only by the signs they leave. Even badger mothers sometimes meet with mishap, which was evidently what had happened in this case, for Crow saw at once that the little waif was already wasted with hunger.

At first the forester hesitated to take it in his hands. He had heard a good deal about the badger's jaws, which, local rumour said, had been known to sever a man's hand at the wrist; yet common sense told Palmer Crow that so tiny a beast was not likely to damage him very severely. He stooped and took it up, at which the little animal nestled at once into the crook of his arm with more grunts of contentment.

Palmer Crow bethought himself of his children. How his little girl would love this infant of the woods! Here was a real live doll for her to feed and to put to bed, but—again Palmer Crow bethought himself of those terrible jaws! Certainly the little creature seemed to have no idea of biting, and his love of the wild things bade him take it home till it could at least fend for itself.

Crow's daughter, Agnes, was aged nine, his boy, Joe, eleven, and the log cabin accommodated only the three of them. The two children went five miles to school each day, but since they were home in the evening an hour before their father, his evening meal was always ready for him when he returned tired from his labours. After the meal Palmer would milk the cow and perform other

outside duties, Joe would carry the daily water from the spring and chop the daily firewood, while Agnes busied herself with the washing up, and such preparations as could be made for to-morrow's meals. Once a week the woman from over the hill came with her carpet bag to do the washing and to clean and tidy the cabin from end to end—all for a few halfpence, and as much milk and vegetables as she and her little son could carry home when the twilight shadows fell.

Into this happy home of the woods, then, the badger cub was taken, and never did a lost and motherless waif receive such a welcome. He was cuddled and soothed by one child, then by the other; next morning he drank his milk, and that day and the next Palmer Crow managed to get home at midday, in order to feed the cub. But the little creature was gradually learning to feed himself from a saucer, and on the fifth day the children took him to school with them.

The forest school was not very strictly conducted. The mistress in charge of it was hardly a beautiful woman, but her children loved her, and she was wise in the knowledge of simple things. Always she chose to teach them the wisdom and beauty of that great purple world in which their lives were cast, and from the primrose banks and the squirrel in the trees she found her object-lessons. The badger cub was something new, and it was given a bed in a corner of the school-

room, though to be sure the mistress showed no eagerness to fondle it. Once or twice, indeed, she departed from her general principle of dismissing fear by saying warningly: "Mind, now, he doesn't bite you."

"Bite!" retorted little Joe at length. "He hasn't any idea of biting. If he snaps at a currant he misses it by inches."

That was indeed a fact, for though the nostrils of the cub were good, his eyes were distinctly indifferent, and he had no idea of distance and practically none of direction. He would, for example, run full tilt into the leg of a chair, and on another occasion he would stop dead and shut his eyes, suddenly fearing collision with some conspicuous object fully a yard away.

That morning a unique spectacle might have been witnessed in the school playground—a badger cub, hobbling hither and thither on unsteady puppy legs after the feet of his little playmates. Their feet was all he could see of them, and seeing a foot or a pair of feet within his limited range of vision, he would make a clumsy dash, probably still thinking of Mother, whereupon the feet would vanish and yet another pair would take their place. Oh, it was a great game, punctuated by peal after peal of joyous laughter!

But it was the last time the badger cub ever played in the school ground, for that evening the mistress was visited by more than one anxious

parent. Did she know that the bite of a badger might sever a man's hand? Had she not heard that the badger was an evil beast, the omen of dread sickness and disease? One ignorant and superstitious woman wagged a warning forefinger and recited:

“ If a badger cross your path,
And then an oolet cry,
Make your peace with God, my friend,
For death is drawing nigh.”

Again, the schoolroom was no place for a notoriously dirty badger, to which the mistress might have replied that the badger might well stand as an example of animal cleanliness, and that all the evil stories about it are utter nonsense. But it is no easy matter to clear ignorant minds of old superstitions, and for the mistress there was nothing for it but to take the road of least resistance, and to forbid Joe Crow ever again to bring his pet to the school.

One Saturday the minister called at Palmer Crow's home, and his word, at any rate, carried weight in his little community, for he was a man of good sound sense and considerable learning. He was much amused at the cub and the lively part it played in the games of the two children, but when after tea he and Palmer sat over their pipes, the woodsman broached the matter which had long troubled his mind.

“ Well,” replied the man of learning, “ I'd take

the cub to the other end of the wood if I were you, Palmer, and lose him there. It may be quite true that he has no idea of biting, for a badger, I know, possesses no temper to speak of. If he bites he does so not because he is angry, but purely in self-defence. Still, you cannot get away from the fact that he is wild beast, and no wild beast can be trusted. Some day, during the course of the most good-natured game, his wild instincts may suddenly prompt him to defend himself, and what then? A child's hand crippled or a child's face scarred for life. It isn't worth the risk."

There was a silence, then: "We're fond of the little animal, sir. A puppy couldn't have been more to us. He's a nice quiet little beast, with a kind of winning way about him."

The parson understood that, but, after all, they had given the cub a good start in life, and if they really loved him, perhaps the kindest thing was to give him back his wild free heritage.

So Palmer told his children, and though the little girl mopped her eyes and the boy was very grave, they liked the idea of giving their wild friend back to his own woodland companions, where among the mosses and the bracken he could wander at will when the moon shone, and when the fairies danced about their fairy rings amidst the murmur of the pines. So next Sunday the three of them took their lunch and set out along the forest ridings. A long way they walked, and at

twelve o'clock they spread their picnic luncheon, and the grey stolid little cub partook of his last meal with them. When this was over they forced their way into the heart of a great thicket, and there in the stillest darkest corner of all the great wood was a badger warren. Many burrows there were, and many playgrounds, and about the entrances much bedding, gathered from a neighbouring grass plot, was littered.

At the mouth of one of the great burrows the cub was put down. He sniffed the earth, then shook himself, and down into the darkness, which was thereafter to hold the secrets of his life, as it has held hitherto and must for ever hold half the secrets of his earthborn race, their friend disappeared.

"There," said the man, a trifle huskily, "I guess he'll do fine now."

And hand in hand, in silence, the man and his two children left the place, for it is strange how even a man can come to love a little creature of the woods whom he has fostered.

THE WAR PENSIONER

The Story of a Jackdaw

The fire left nothing of the great hydro save the walls with their stark sightless windows, but wild nature is never slow to take over what man abandons, and that winter thousands of starlings took to roosting among the ruins. I watched them many a night, pack after pack, sweeping in from up the glen and down the glen, planing across the mountain face, to alight high on the gable end, which was, and is, the outstanding feature of that wreckage of man's handiwork. It was usually near the close of dark when they arrived, but there was still light enough for shadows to be cast, and such were their numbers that their coming cast a shadow over all the shadowy place. There for a while they would perch and sing, these birds which are so well able to fend for themselves, because they are so industrious; then suddenly silence would fall, like the closing of a door, and the still chill night would creep up from the glen.

When spring came the great packs split up into twos, and of the vast armies which all winter had

roosted there, there remained now but the merest smattering. One bright March morning no one heeded the pair of jackdaws which flew over the ruin, chattering quietly as they flew. On they went till lost among the trees, then they turned back and alighted on the ruins. Having surveyed their picturesque surroundings, they set to work with a will, peeping into the crannies, removing here a chunk of plaster, exploring the ledges, till they came upon a place which evidently suited their requirements, for they struck up a lively quarrel with the brace of starlings already occupying it.

Now, when a jackdaw sets his heart upon a thing, he usually gets it by his impudent persistence, but, as I say, starlings are well able to defend their rights. Thus the matter was not to be settled in five minutes. The jackdaws gaped and hissed and stabbed, but the starlings returned to the attack time and again, and thus the attention of the other starlings was attracted, and within ten minutes several neighbours were lending the original two very able assistance. The result was that the jackdaws soon found the place a little too hot for them, so away they flew in scrambling, shuffling flight, with twenty or thirty starlings chasing them.

On the following morning quite a little party of jackdaws arrived, and forthwith proceeded to explore the ruins. But they were late on the

scene. Every available corner was already booked by the starlings. In the ordinary way this would not have mattered much, for more often than not, the starlings are the jackdaws' scullery-maids. The starlings industriously clear their nesting sites. They claw out chunks of plaster and achieve surprising engineering feats for their strength, thus opening out the nesting possibilities of the place. Jack comes along, drives out the rightful owners, and himself takes the property.

So the hydro starlings were just beginning to realize that if they were to hold their own there was nothing for it but combined defence. Here was a mighty stronghold, and whosoever held it would become great in the land. If it fell to the jackdaws, then that region would know many jackdaws during the seasons to come; if to the starlings, then likewise their race would prosper and multiply. It was a place worth fighting for, since on the outcome of that battle rested the prosperity of one species or the other.

All that day a remorseless battle was going on between the jackdaws and the starlings, and an hour after noon the jackdaws flew off and left the starlings in possession. My heart was glad for these industrious birds, for they had shown up well. I thought the war was ended, but about an hour later fifty jackdaws came, fifty if one, and they set to work at once to drive the starlings out. They wasted no time exploring; they just went

right in, and the feathers began to fly. Every starling present rose from his shelf to the topmost eaves, and the noises of battle filled the glen. But there was one starling who, during the mid-day interval of peace, had sat on the topmost pinnacle, warbling and viewing the surrounding landscape. He did not join in the fray. As soon as he saw the jackdaws coming back he uttered a piercing shriek, and flew off down the glen, as though in terror of his life. But I knew that he was not afraid; he was the sentry.

So the jackdaws and the starlings fought. On every ledge and outcrop of that stark gable end they could be seen, going at each other hammer and tongs, while the feathers wafted slowly down, to rest among the charred débris or among the nettles far below.

Ten minutes passed with no decisive victory, then the starling sentry came back, and with him in closely packed formation a band of his fellows from away down the valley. Behind them was a space of perhaps fifty yards, then another starling flying singly; another space and then another pack, and so on in a seemingly unending chain. For an hour these birds came teeming in from down the valley, till thousands of starlings were gathered about those charred, incongruous walls.

And the jackdaws—what of them? They too were calling up reserves, and I saw the messenger go. I saw him rise over the tree-tops, shedding

feathers as he flew, and I thought that he was vanquished. But after a while he came back, and with him a little pack of jackdaws from away up the Devil's Beef Tub, and behind that pack a second and a third, like leaves drawn into the corner of the glen by the forces of a rising gale.

So as the starling army grew, the jackdaw army likewise grew, each intent on settling a question on which much might hinge during the years to come.

Sundown drew near, the air seemed to be black with jackdaws, while the shrieks of the smaller birds, their piercing whistles and cat-calls, veritably set one's nerves on edge. It was a battle, a great battle, and one's impression was that the jackdaws far outnumbered the starlings, and were certain in the end to win. Then, as one watched, that decision wavered a little. Every jackdaw had two, three, as many as eight starlings to fight. The starlings far outnumbered the jackdaws, though, being smaller, they were not so much in evidence. And the starling reinforcements were still drifting in from wold and moorland, while the jackdaws, it seemed, had already thrown all their strength into the fighting front.

Believe me, those starlings fought with the strength of moral courage. They fought as an invaded nation fights, to defend their own, and the jackdaws, the invaders, turned at sundown and flew back over the tree-tops, silent and

shuffling, defeated, bested, leaving the coveted stronghold to those who rightly owned it.

But they left one of their number behind them. He sat on the top of the towering wall, calling to the others as they went away into the leaden light, calling and spreading his wings as a soldier might hold out his arms to his retreating comrades. This jackdaw was disabled. I had noticed him during the fight. About a dozen starlings had set about him, and he had fallen from the apex down upon a turret, fully twenty feet below. He had seemed for a while stunned, for he sat with his feathers puffed out, taking no part in the contest, and the starlings had left him alone, perhaps because they knew that he was out of the fight. Now, when he saw his friends leaving him, he became frenzied, but off they went over the blue pine trees, over the laughing burn, towards the light and mystery of such sunset as there was.

But eventually one in the pack faltered and fell astern as though she had forgotten something. She turned, hovered, looked, called, then went back. She reached the gable end, but the starlings met her and tried to drive her off. She stabbed and clawed, and since she was but one, the starlings did not insist as they might have done. Eventually they let her alight beside the wounded one, and in the last fading light of day I saw the two jackdaws seated side by side rubbing their heads together.

So ere long the starlings came to know that it was not now a question of defending their rights. The jackdaws had given it up; they were defeated, and there remained in their midst only a broken soldier, one who was more defeated even than those who had retired—one for whom the hospitality of their shelter was a soldier's privilege, and a soldier's honour to give.

For many days that wounded daw lived on the topmost ruins, lived on the fat of the land, because the starlings fed him. Their instincts to feed the dependent at that season were in full swing. All of them were busy with their nests, some had eggs, a few had young. The female birds were fully occupied over their own affairs, but many of the males were idle. It was the male starlings, I believe, which fed the wounded jackdaw, as you or I might feed a wounded foe. His own mate fed him too, and there among the ruins he would sit and flap his wings whenever a starling passed, calling to it for food, and opening wide his beak to accommodate any morsel thrust therein.

The two jackdaws nested there, and spring after spring, since the battle of the gable end was fought, one pair of jackdaws have nested among the many starlings, accepted without question, occupying each spring the same lofty nook, and bringing their clamorous young safely into the world of cloud and sunshine.

KARAKA

The Tale of a Kingfisher

I

Very early one morning, before there was sufficient light to see objects clearly, Karaka, the kingfisher, led his mate down the river, very much farther than their customary home range extended. Indeed they lived normally within a mile of their home pool, but now they flew straight and true a matter of twelve miles, just two living streaks of brightest emerald green, touched with tongues of fire—the most resplendent of our wild birds.

I say straight and true, but that is so far as the kingfisher ever flies straight, and he flies just as straight as is his home river. In other words, he follows the river, and never leaves its waters. The reason for this we shall see later, and it was thus, flying five feet above the surface, that Karaka and his mate followed the river to the place whither they were going. Had they chosen to take the overland route they would have arrived within eight minutes, for the river was tortuous, but the kingfisher never does choose the overland route

unless man bars his way, when he may make a detour, but as soon as prudence permits he returns to his beloved stream. No man has ever seen a kingfisher flying overland for the love of the thing. But the last half-mile of their journey was as nearly overland as makes no difference; they followed a tiny stream not more than half an inch deep for the most part, and not more than a foot wide, which led up the steep mountain face. Here, in a hollow among the undulations, were five queer little pens, which might have been mistaken for pheasant-rearing pens. They were of wire netting, and distinct from pheasant pens in that the wire extended over their roofs, so that there was no way in and certainly no way out. Inside each pen was an oblong pond, fed by the tiny stream. Clearly the ponds were man-made, and the stream trickled over miniature waterfalls from one to the next. And inside each pond were thousands of tiny trout.

This, indeed, was a trout farm, under the daily care of the river-keeper. Each autumn he collected the trout eggs from the streams, placing them on glass rods inside oblong sluice boxes just above the top pond. The little trout, as they hatched, dropped between the rods into the gravel at the bottom of the box. As they began to stir about they found the outlet, which carried them by gentle stages to pond No. 1. There, tended every day, fed on egg and chopped-up liver, they lived in

security, till, at the age of twelve months or thereabouts, the desire to wander again came upon them. So they again found the outlet, for the inlet was perpendicular, and thus to pond No. 2 they made their way. So the silting process proceeded, and while the top pond contained very tiny trout, the bottom one contained fish which were worthy of the angler's creel. But these little trout, be it understood, were as zealously guarded by their keeper as are pheasant chicks by the keeper of the coverts.

Evidently it was not the first time Karaka the kingfisher had been here, for he settled on the ridge of rearing pond No. 1 to take in his surroundings, and his wife settled beside him.

Now, even the river keeper would have told you that the kingfisher, in its tropical plumage, was a comparatively rare bird in that northern land, but he would have been surprised had he seen what Karaka saw that morning. The man knew that one kingfisher or more was likely to visit his ponds any time at the day's breaking, but he would have told you that the entire length of river under his and his assistant's keeping could not have yielded more than three pairs of these birds.

But now, in the first morning light, ere the brown owls had gone to roost and before Reynard sought the covers, there were at least six pairs—a dozen birds in all—trying to find a way into that

yearling pen. They beat themselves against the wire netting, they vigorously explored the little waterfalls which formed the inlet and the outlet, they were as busy as starlings around a bowl of mashed potatoes.

Karaka was wise. He settled among the rushes which overgrew the wire netting where it met the earth, and closely followed by his mate, he explored those rushes. So at length he found a way in, a way engineered by the water-voles which had burrowed under the netting, and his wife followed him through. And the rest of the kingfishers followed her.

Once in the enclosure they dived and swallowed and dived. How many tiny trout they took I dare not think, and luckily the keeper never knew. Fish-eating birds generally have immense appetites, and the kingfishers were no exception. Finally, however, even they were satisfied, whereupon, alas, they fell to fighting! They fought till the mirror-like surface was strewn with shimmering emerald feathers.

The man lived quite near; he was an early riser, and his first act each day was to feed his tiny trout. That morning as he came down, the kingfishers saw him long before he saw them. Karaka flew full tilt for the hole among the rushes by which he had entered. He seemed to fly straight through it without properly closing his wings. His wife followed him at the same speed, and the rest

of them followed her, so that, it seemed, there was one long thin tongue of emerald fire down the tiny spring to the river.

But, as usual, there was one which did not see till it was too late. So he found himself alone in the oblong prison, saw the keeper, and the keeper saw him. Up and down he flew, striking the wires, all but beating himself senseless, but in his panic he could not find the way out.

The keeper, who had not seen the others and so never guessed, armed himself with an old landing net, then entered by his tiny door, which he safely closed behind him. For twenty heated minutes he hunted that living streak up and down. In the end the imprisoned bird remembered the outlet, and escaped screaming madly, whereupon the keeper produced from his store-house a small iron trap, and set it among the rushes on the water-vole run.

At dawn next day Karaka and his mate returned. It was earlier even than yesterday, and Karaka entered eagerly, for they had the place to themselves. He entered, that is, till two strong jaws bade him wait, his body blocking the tiny passageway, and there, a hopeless captive, he remained.

Karaka did not try to escape. He just crouched where he was, and his mate flew back to the apex. Then she—and he—awaited what the fates might bring.

They brought, an hour later, the river keeper,

not half so dreadful a creature as they thought him. Though the kingfishers were his enemies, this man knew the ways of wild nature so well that the act of killing was ever hateful to him. Many a time his manhood had failed when an old foe was at his mercy, or rather his manhood had wakened at his victim's very helplessness, and so it was that morning when he took the lovely impotent thing from his trap. Kill it he could not.

"Look here, my lad," said he, holding little Karaka in his hands. "I'll give you just one more chance, but if ever again you trespass here, I'll take the only thing more beautiful than your colouring! Your beauty I can never take, because it would go with the going of your life, but the latter is in my hands to-day."

He went back to his tiny hut with the kingfisher in his grasp, and with an old pair of shears he cut away half the bird's tail feathers, then he let Karaka go to join his mate, banking and screaming near.

Troubles never come singly, and as Karaka fled from the horrible place, flying all lop-sidedly because of his unbalanced rudder, no doubt the sparrow hawk which lived in the fir wood saw that there was something wrong with that bird. So he came pelting down the slope, aiming ahead of his intended quarry, to appear like a rocket between two alders just as Karaka gained the gap.



JUST TOO LATE!

Karaka had just time to act, but no more. There was but one thing to do if he were to live, and he did it. He closed, like an oyster, and plunged headforemost into the stream. The hawk struck the surface six inches in the rear, casting high the diamond spray, but by then Karaka was well below the surface, heading for the willow bushes which overhung the bank, and so the hawk saw him no more.

We see now why kingfishers always follow the water. It affords an impenetrable refuge against their earth-born foes; had Karaka been over land he would assuredly have died.

The kingfisher had learnt his lesson, and neither he nor his mate ever again returned to the hunting-ground of the wire pens.

That is the first story about Karaka the kingfisher, and next I will tell you the second story about him and his mate and the mirror pool where they had their home.

II

By the mirror pool where Karaka the kingfisher and his mate had their home, they spent their happy days together. Their usual method of fishing was to perch on a branch and watch till a small fish passed below—to dive like a ray of light, seize it, and return to the perch, there to hammer it senseless. Once Karaka settled on a salmon-fisher's rod, and it was strange that, though so timid a bird, he refused to leave his perch even when the man raised the rod in his hands. Indeed it was not until the angler threw at him a paper ball, having just finished his lunch and so having the missile handy, that Karaka decided to forsake his precarious seat. Perhaps, having realized his awful mistake, he was at first petrified with terror, but they are strange unaccountable birds in many ways, those beautiful kingfishers.

Sometimes, too—some days, that is, though what the conditions of weather, wind, or water were which influenced their hunting, no man could say—sometimes they did their fishing a-wing, conducting themselves like miniature gannets or like giant humming-birds hawking up and down the stream, suddenly to close their wings and dive head foremost into the water, emerging with their prey. While their nearest neighbours, the dippers,

lived entirely upon insects, it cannot be doubted that the kingfishers lived entirely on fish, and daily took their toll of the most sporting and the best. The humming-birds of the stream one might have called them, for in ways, as in colours, they were like the birds of the flowers.

Each night the kingfishers roosted in the hole in the sandy bank where Karaka was born. Also they spent a good deal of every day there, evidently very busy underground, despite the fact that winter reigned supreme. For if, on a still day, one approached the pool, one saw that the surface directly below their burrow was covered with floating sand dust, and other indications showed that digging activities were going on within, the birds throwing into the pool the sand they removed. They were, for reasons of their own, constructing two new holes, about a yard in from the entrance, so that, at that point, the passage resembled the three prongs of a salmon spear. The old hole led straight on, the two new ones ran off at angles of about 30 degrees from the first.

It was at the end of one of these new passages that, early in February, the two kingfishers began to make their nest. They did not stick sharp fish bones, slanting outwards, into the walls, so as to trap the hand of the unwary, as the village boys might have told you, and the word "make" can hardly be applied to the formation of that nest, though truly they hollowed out a chamber for it.

Within that chamber they cast up from their bills the bones of fish which they had swallowed. These were in the form of hard pellets, similar to those which owls and the like bring up as a convenient means of dispensing with the necessity of skinning and boning their quarry, but the pellets quickly dried, and were trodden by the feet of the birds into soft powder, which was, I suppose, better than the cold earth for the reception of the eggs.

So everything was ready for the spring when the spring came, but in truth its coming was rather by the calendar than by fact. The kingfishers' first egg was laid during a snowstorm, and how they banked and flashed and called and darted! Sometimes Karaka sat on the dead pine branch which had been his favourite perch before he had a mate, and there sung his strange, warbling, rasping song, in which the oft-repeated word "Karaka" was the only sound that one could catch. The rest was sung in so subdued and rusty a jumble that, unlike his coat, it was devoid of high lights, but there were two good things about his song—it was short, and no one heard it.

Four eggs had been laid when one day a stranger, who was not of that land, came down to the pool edge. In one hand he carried a trowel, and on his back was slung a small haversack.

Both kingfishers were in the burrow, but they heard or felt his steps, and Karaka emerged and

flew off, though his mate remained with her eggs.

So the man dug down to the fork, but luckily for the kingfishers he accidentally blocked the branch in which lay their treasures, still faithfully covered by the hen bird. She, indeed, found herself entrapped when she would have flown, and the man, after much hard digging among the roots of the giant beech, came to the end of the original shaft. Here he found only an old nest, the one in which Karaka was reared, so he turned his attention to the second shaft, only to find it too an empty *cul de sac*. So, having had many similar experiences when hunting for the eggs of the kingfisher, he filled in his excavation, stamped home the earth, replaced the sods, and went his way, very out at elbow with his luck.

Having seen him safely off the premises, Karaka returned to his broken home. He found the passage-way blocked, but evidently he knew that his wife was imprisoned within, for he began to dig with his bill and his claws. Frenziedly he worked, casting the sand behind him into the pool, while she was digging away on the other side of the barrier, where the air was rapidly giving out.

For twenty minutes or so Karaka worked, and when at length he got to his mate she was gasping for breath. Out she flew and away up the river. For three days neither of them returned to the pool, but their love for their pure white treasures

hidden beside it finally overcame their horror of the place, and back they went. So, again, it became for them a very happy home, as for many a kingfisher before them, and by the time the daffodils along the banks were fading and the hyacinths began to clothe the forest foot in blue, it seemed that a whole new colony of kingfishers hunted the pool where the stately beech tree grew.

And so to this day the kingfishers are there, those living rays of emerald light, those humming-birds of the river banks, and if it be not their lot in life to add music to the music of the stream, they at least add much to its beauty and interest, for to see them is to see one of the most lovely of living things, and to go one's way refreshed. But, though they are always there, they are very seldom seen.



THE ADVENTURES OF SUISSE

The Red Squirrel

Old M'Diarmid's cottage nestled at the burn edge, sheltered by a fringe of lordly pines, and in these trees one morning a solitary little squirrel made its appearance. "Lost," thought M'Diarmid, and he and his wife welcomed the little russet stranger, for it was a very lonely place, and there were not many animals about. But Suisse, the red squirrel, looking down from the pines, was not quite sure of the man, nor of his dog, nor of the shining bucket in the yard by the door, though he was quite prepared to regard these things as natural features of the landscape so long as they left him alone. He had been driven out of his home wood by the great gale of last night; it had blown down his particular tree, and sent other trees crashing in all directions, for it was an old wood. And so that morning he sat in the pines, wondering whether or not he should settle here. It turned out a chilly evening, and during the night cold squalls of rain fell, and when M'Diarmid went out next day, he saw the little squirrel cuddled up against one side of the chimney pot

of the cottage, trying to keep warm. The chimney was never cold, for Mrs. M'Diarmid burnt peat, and banked up her fire every night, so as to keep their living, eating, and sleeping room at a comfortable temperature.

M'Diarmid, like most shepherds of the hills, was a kind-hearted man, and forthwith he produced a wooden box, filled it with hay, nailed on a waterproof lid, and climbing to the roof, he firmly attached the box to the chimney pot.

This simple and kindly act was the salvation of Suisse, and forthwith he proceeded to become a part of the household. He spent most of his time on the roof, showering bits of plaster on to the ears of the sheep dog that basked below on a grimy old sack which served as a door mat. From the roof Suisse could run along the yard wall, across the gate, and so into the pines, without touching ground, and usually he decided to make this trip when the hens were gathered along the wall-top in goggle-eyed array. He would then tear along, sending them scattering in all directions, but the hens soon became used to him, and learnt to keep him in his place. More than once the shepherd and his wife laughed merrily as they watched one of the daily struggles between Suisse and the old cockerel for some morsel of food thrown into the yard.

Food? Suisse in these days was literally surrounded by food, and, because he was a squirrel

and because winter was not far off, he daily stored more food in his nesting box than he could eat. So eventually the box became so full of food that there was hardly any room for Suisse himself, and one morning Mrs. M'Diarmid, looking out, saw a cascade of crusts and bones and old potatoes somersaulting out of the nesting box, to trickle and bounce down the tiles, while after each avalanche the head of the squirrel appeared from the box and chattered abuse at the descending cascade. This mid-week cleaning-up process was repeated for so long as Suisse remained, yet he could never quite resist the desire to hoard food, especially when the thing he hoarded belonged to someone else. So, when Mrs. M'Diarmid complained that the gutter-spouts were becoming choked, the shepherd cheerfully replied: "Och, Jessie, but he keeps us young. It's a joy to see him about the place."

Thus, that wild and windy winter, Suisse remained a guest on a poor man's charity, but with the first breath of spring, while the hills were still white and radiantly wonderful in the growing light, a new restlessness began to dawn upon him. One day he wandered off up the burn, but he had so little idea of what he was going to do that he suddenly became afraid on finding himself without a tree anywhere near, and scampered back. A second time he set out with the real intention of going on to the big wood, but a branch borne

by the wind fell across his path, and he fled back to the pine ridge, his nerves all on edge, for a squirrel hates to travel over country where there are no trees.

But at length Suisse had to turn out, for one evening he was perched high up in the pines watching the sunset over the rugged sea of peaks when a pine cone dropped through the branches of the tree next to him. It was deadly still, and the sound made him start, and Suisse, looking up, saw a creature watching him from the adjoining tree—such a creature as he had never seen before. It was like a squirrel, a huge squirrel, a beautiful squirrel, save that it had a little fox-shaped head, and its coat was glossy chocolate. Pretty though it was, there was just something about it which seemed to suggest that it was a weasel, and the weasels are the highwaymen and the murderers of the woods. Thus Suisse and the pine marten looked into each other's eyes, and to Suisse came the sudden knowledge that he was face to face with the most deadly enemy of the squirrel tribe.

Suisse fled to the end of the limb, dropped four feet, scuttled head downwards down the trunk, and flattened himself on the outside of the tree, but the pine marten came on. That was all there was to it—he just *came on*, after Suisse. His legs moved at invisible speed. He flashed along the limb, and in an instant Suisse had to drop again.



Then the race began. Suisse dodged and turned and scrambled and looped, but the marten ran straight, ran steadily without pausing, without jerking, always straight at poor Suisse. It fled from limb to limb

as though suspended by an invisible wire from above, and though Suisse was straining every muscle, it seemed just to be playing with him. But Suisse was a wise little squirrel. He decided where he was going, and proceeded forthwith to go. He came down from tree to tree at a steady slant, tapped the wall top, rocketed to earth within an inch of the sleeping dog curled up by the door, and thence



leapt for the open window of the cottage, by which Mrs. M'Diarmid was knitting. Suisse actually landed on her

ERNEST
ATKINS

knees, and would probably have darted into the stocking she was darning, but that she jumped up with a startled cry, and the stocking, bristling needles, fell to the floor. Another leap and Suisse was among the oatcakes drying on a clothes-horse before the fire, and yet another and he was safely ambushed on top of the side of bacon suspended from the ceiling.

Mrs. M'Diarmid was really angry at his impudence, for she had no idea that he was running for his life. She got a stick, and calling him names she poked him down, then she chased him with an oven cloth till poor Suisse was again driven out of the window. He sat on the window ledge, trembling, and then at last Mrs. M'Diarmid realized that something must be wrong. She went to the door, and there she saw what it was. The marten had leapt down after the squirrel, alighting near to the dog, and the dog, which had opened one sleepy eye when Suisse brushed past him, had just muttered to himself: "Oh, that's only old Suisse!" But when the marten came down, the dog recognized him as a stranger, and leapt up instantly, bristling and showing his teeth. He made a dash, but the pine marten, quicker than he was, leapt to the low roof, and a moment later had taken shelter in the squirrel's nesting box. So when Mrs. M'Diarmid came out, she saw a pretty little fox-like head peering from the box. She saw the marten's bright eyes and his flaming orange front, and she said aloud: "Oh, you beautiful little thing! Surely

it cannot be you that has frightened poor Suisse."

But just then her husband came home, and when he saw the marten he was very much surprised. "Yes," he told his wife, "pretty enough, but they're wicked little creatures. A marten will kill almost anything. Where's my gun?"

"Oh, you can't shoot it!" said his wife. "That would be too bad."

"He'll kill the squirrel if I don't," said Mr. M'Diarmid. Then for a moment he thought. "No," he said. "I won't shoot it. Martens are too rare. There used to be plenty of them in Scotland, but now they're almost gone. I suppose they are the rarest wild beast in all Great Britain, so I won't shoot it."

"Why did they become so rare?"

"Oh," said the shepherd, "it's just the old story! Because they are so pretty, man had to destroy them. There are some people who prefer a mummy in a glass case to a living thing, and so the martens were just wiped out of existence."

"But what shall we do?" asked Mrs. M'Diarmid.

"Take care of the squirrel till he goes," the shepherd answered. "Martens are the most restless gipsy folk in the woods. I guess he won't stay long."

As a matter of fact the marten was gone before they had finished tea, and they never saw him again, for which they were rather sorry, since he was such a beautiful beast. That night and the next day Suisse lived in the kitchen. He dare

not show his nose in the open. Eventually, however, he went out, and found that the marten was gone, so now he made up his mind, and bounded off as fast as his legs would carry him, back to the big wood, where he had lived all his life till he went to M'Diarmid's cottage. So for a fortnight the box on the roof was empty, but one evening, when the shepherd came back from the hill, his wife was awaiting him.

"Ronald," she said, "the squirrel's come back, and he has brought his wife with him. She's been cleaning out the box and carrying in fresh straw from the barn. Such a mess on the step you never saw, and the gutter's full of it."

But they looked at each other and smiled, and one could tell from their smiles that they were really very glad to have Suisse back again.



THE LITTLE BROWN SENTRY

Or, The Wren Bachelor

Trog, the wren, otherwise the little brown sentry, sat on a twig overhanging the pool, and churred his disapproval. No one but Trog had seen the house rat as it ran along under the bank for a yard or so, then vanished into a hole; no one knew what Trog was churring at, yet his alarm had the effect of gathering round him half a dozen chaffinches, a blackbird, and an extremely officious robin—all protesting loudly, but in complete ignorance as to why they were making such a noise.

Trog, the wren, was no larger than a man's thumb, yet he was a person of considerable standing among the feathered folk. Nothing escaped Trog, and he cared for no one. He was too small and too quick for anyone to catch. He could dodge through crevices and crannies where not even a stoat could follow, and always he was nosing about and in and out of the shady nooks and corners, where the shady people live, which was why he saw so much.

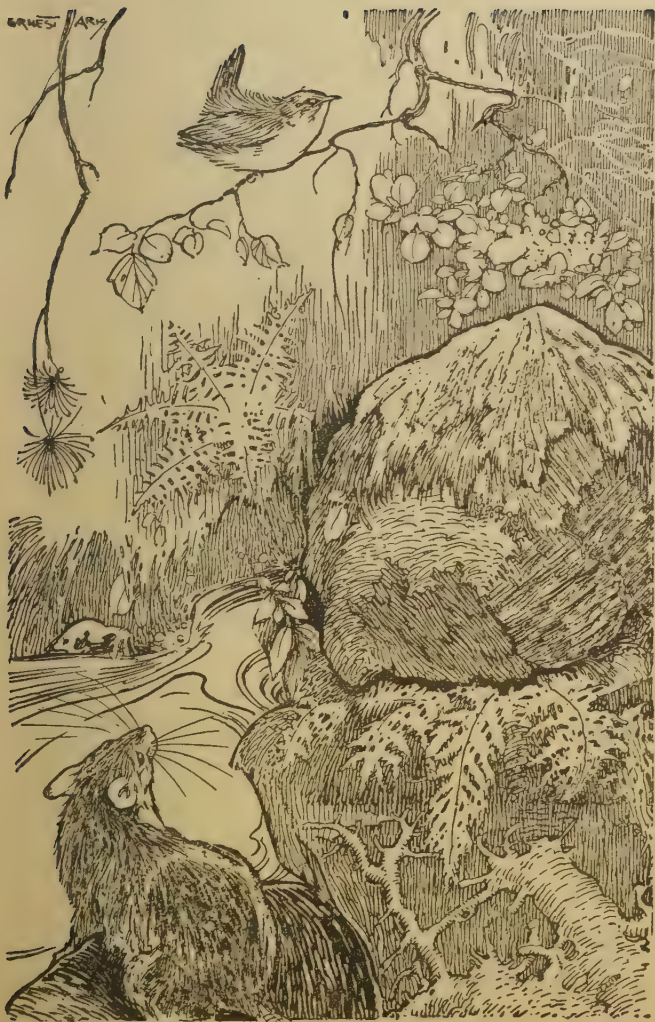
But it was clever of Trog to spot that rat, or

rather to identify it instantly as a house rat, for practically every day he saw water rats at the same place, and never heeded them. Them he recognized as friendly folk, but the brown rat, he evidently knew, was an alien and a bad lot. So he sat on the tiny twig, bobbing, reversing, and rasping, when all at once a new and a truly dreadful turn of events claimed the boards.

Trog was not more than a foot above the water, and his little drab form among the blossoms attracted the eye of a mammoth trout lurking in the depths below. The huge fish dashed to the surface and leapt clean out—a scintillating silver flash, quick as a ray of light. His cruel jaws closed on the twig on which Trog had sat, then back he flopped, with a sullen roar of water and amidst a million jewels flashing rainbow colours.

But Trog had darted off in the very ace of time—so quickly, indeed, that no one saw him go. It was as though an invisible elastic had yanked him into empty space, and the other birds fled, gibbering with fear; but ere the trout had fairly regained the water, Trog's head appeared from a mouse hole in the bank exactly one yard from the twig—churring more indignantly than before. He was not afraid, oh no! not even startled, only more annoyed than ever.

After a little while things automatically cooled down, and Trog proceeded on his way towards the wild washout which lay between the wood



THE BROWN RAT, AN ALIEN AND A BAD LOT

and the pasture. It was a deep little ravine, running up the steep mountain face, and the many floods had undermined the roots of the trees which grew at its edge, so that their fibrous roots trailed like giant whiskers from the overhang, forming a natural labyrinth above the stream on either side. Here and there the trees had toppled over, constructing natural bridges, and the whole place was so overgrown with mountain ash, alder, and brambles that it formed an ideal home for the small brown bird.

It was already late spring, and most of the married wrens were busy with their family affairs, but Trog had been unable to find a mate that year. Among the fibrous roots, near to Trog's home range, another pair of wrens had their nest, now containing eggs—a wonderful little affair, built of the materials which surrounded it, so that it was almost invisible. It had a side entrance and a covered roof, and was as comfortable as any nest could be.

Trog was well acquainted with those two wrens, and on fairly good terms with them, so it occurred to him to see how they were getting on. He went rather cautiously, and as he neared the nest he saw the gentleman bird approach it with a grub or something in his beak, and this he offered to his wife, then flew off.

This gave Trog an idea. He too flew off, but in the opposite direction, and hunted up a wire

worm; then—somewhat cautiously it must be admitted—he approached the nest containing the lady wren, keeping a weather eye open for her husband. At first she hissed at him, but seeing the plump wire-worm she evidently decided that there was no objection to doing a little profiteering, so she took it.

Just then her husband appeared, carrying a bundle of spiders, but seeing Trog he dropped the spiders, and hurled himself to the attack, and Trog fled in panic.

That was enough for Trog. What could have been more cordially civil than offering the lady a wire-worm? and yet—behold the uncharitable attitude of her mate!

Yet the spirit of the spring was calling, and having overcome his first ruffled feelings, Trog set to work on a new line. What was there to prevent his having a nest of his own? Nothing; so forthwith Trog set to work to build a nest. He made it of leaves, moss, and roots, and the exterior was quite a harmony. He worked on it for the remainder of that day, neglecting his meals while the fever possessed him, and by midday next day the exterior was finished, and it only wanted lining.

At this stage, however, Trog discovered that he had left a chunk of soil, quite as big as himself inside the nest. It was too heavy for him to hoist out of the front door, and too hard to break up,

so that he could throw out the bits. So he hissed at and churred at and abused the chunk, and finally he set to work to build another nest not ten paces away.

The second nest, it must be admitted, was in every sense a success, and Trog took to sleeping in it. Indeed, it became his home, and one night he appeared with a gay bachelor friend, to whom he evidently extended an invitation to stay overnight.

Next night the gay bachelor friend again turned up, bringing with him a friend of his own, and, invited or not, they both decided to stay with Trog. This kind of thing went on night after night, till at the end of a week there were no less than nine gay bachelors sharing Trog's nest. And, oh, the noise at roosting time!

But the irony of it came on the tenth night, when for some reason or other Trog arrived home late, and found his nest full of gay bachelors. They told him distinctly that there was no room—that he would have to sleep elsewhere. They were already sleeping on the top of each other; if any more came in the floor would fall through. Trog flew up and down objecting noisily, but it was of no use. The reply of "full house" met his every appeal. There was no getting in; already the nest was chock-a-block to the roof, and no one intended getting out. So, with the brown owl's hoot, Trog cast a final "good night" over his

shoulder, and hopped into his old roosting-place among the roots.

Trog was an industrious and good-natured little soul, for next day, between intervals of flying off to churr at an owl which he had discovered sleeping harmlessly in the open, he set to work to make yet another nest, leaving the old one in the hands of the Night Club. He worked diligently, and luckily, by the following evening, it was quite habitable, though rather rough and ready. For that evening broke dark and windy, and Trog was glad to have a roof over his head.

An hour or so later it began to rain—such rain! The wind dropped, and all nature seemed to devote itself to the one task of raining. It came down solid, filling the wood with a sullen roar, breaking down the dead branches, and swilling the dry leaves into long dams and ridges. Even Prickles, the hedgehog, sought the dense cover, and everywhere half-drowned and wretched-looking rabbits, flooded out of their burrows, could be seen dragging about over the sodden earth.

The storm ceased with an ominous suddenness, and dead silence followed. Then a screech owl screeched, and instantly the cry was taken up. Sandpipers piped, cocks crew, high on the moors the curlews whistled, overhead a snipe commenced to drum.

Then the stream which flowed down the ravine began to rise. Usually its voice was the merest

murmur, now it began to laugh, and the laugh gradually grew to a roar.

All the wrens awoke. They were not unaware of the danger of being flooded out. The bachelor party teemed forth into the fibrous roots, and hopping from place to place they churred at the stream. Trog also hopped out, and he also churred because the others were doing so, though as a matter of fact his nest was high and dry, safely above the highest water mark.

Not so the nest of the married wrens higher up the stream, for the waters rose and rose till the frail structure was in real danger of being washed out. Luckily the youngsters were just old enough to leave it, and they had to leave in a hurry. Their parents were in no end of a way, flying, alighting, churring, chirping, and Trog threw in his lot with them, helping still to pour abuse upon the troubled waters. For once a common grievance drew them together, and as they watched the nest gave way, or rather the whole trailing structure on which it was built vanished with a gurgling gasp into the stream!

There was now nothing for it but to make the best of things. It was all right being angry with the stream for a while, but there was not much in it when the night was chill and one was sleepy.

So Trog eventually began to hop back towards his own nest. Whether he invited the others to accompany him, or whether they followed simply

because he was going somewhere, I am unable to say. At any rate behind Trog followed the lady wren, and behind her came her seven children. And they all piled into Trog's new nest, and Trog was at the bottom of the pile.

Next morning broke fine and sunny, and Trog was off in good time. He did not return till close upon dusk, and on his arrival he hardly knew the nest. For the lady wren had been tidying up. She had added a lining too, and considerably improved the outside appearances of the place. Moreover, her children were inside the nest, and she was on the roof. Her husband, also, was inconveniently near, and he and she lost no time in letting Trog see that he was not welcome.

Trog, a little downhearted, flew back to his original nest, but again found it full of bachelors. They had no room for him, and—they weren't half giving the place what for! Already the paper was off the walls and the ceiling was coming down in chunks.

Finally Trog remembered his first nest, the first he had built, and deciding that it was better to have a clod of earth as a bedmate than to have no bed at all, he adjourned to investigate. But as he looked into the nest, a lizard poked out its head at him, and with one shriek of dismay and anger Trog fled.

And after all, what was wrong with his old snug little roosting place among the fibrous roots, where

he had slept every night last winter? He had managed to sing his songs when other birds were silent, and blessed indeed are those who can rejoice alone! Yes, Trog was tired of nests. The matted roots would do for him in future.



THE VISITOR FROM THE WILD

The Tale of an Otter

When the secretary of the famous north-country Zoological Gardens was told by the keepers that a wild otter was frequenting the duck ponds, he could hardly believe it, for the otter is a shy and wary beast, which seldom approaches man's dwellings. Moreover, the gardens were more or less surrounded by houses, and the river was six miles away. Certainly it seemed hardly likely that a wild otter would choose to make its home there, for every day crowds of visitors were present in the grounds.

"Come and see for yourself, sir," said the keeper, and taking the secretary to the duck ponds, he showed him the prints of the otter's feet in the mud all round.

"Well," said the secretary, "we can't let him stay here. Some of the ducks are worth large sums of money, and if the wild otter takes to killing them, it will be an expensive business."

So traps were set for the otter, but he was too cunning to allow himself to be caught. Why, indeed, should he take a bait from a trap when there

were always plenty of frogs in the duck pond, and mice about the shrubberies? Also there was fresh fish enough for him, for many of the birds and beasts were fed daily on fish, and there was always a little left over.

So the days passed, and though there was abundant evidence that the wild otter was active every night, he did no harm among the wild fowl. This was no ordinary Zoo. There were no pacing captives here. The lion cubs had a rocky fortress of their own away up the slope, the leopards reclined luxuriously among sunlit branches, and about those wonderful ponds, rich in herbs and flowers, many wild fowl lived and loved.

It would seem that from the very first Tinker, the wild otter, realized that he must observe the rules of the park. Any night he could have killed one or several of the beautiful coloured ducks, but he left them alone, and before very long it became evident that he was paying his footing. Since his arrival, water-voles and rats, which had been playing havoc with the artificial bankings, simply vanished, and the keeper of the ponds, who was a kind-hearted man, was now only anxious to see the wild otter in the flesh. Every morning he saw where Tinker had played and fed, but he had not yet seen the otter. One morning, however, when the old keeper was going his round, he heard a strange clucking noise behind him, and looking round, he saw the grass part as some

creature came towards him. The keeper threw down a little lobster, then moved away, and out of the grass slipped Tinker, the wild otter. He seized the lobster and ran off with it, for of all things on earth Tinker loved lobster.

That was the first step, and each morning thereafter Tinker would appear at that place to be fed by the keeper, and within a fortnight he would creep up and take his food from the keeper's hands. That shows us how soon a wild beast will learn to trust man when it has no need to fear him. Having made friends with the keeper, it was not long before Tinker learnt also to trust the other human beings who every day visited the park.

The secretary was now glad that they had not trapped little Tinker, for he became a great attraction at the Zoo. Many went to see the wild beast which had chosen to make its home among men, and sometimes when bands of happy children stood at the water's edge throwing food to the ducks and gulls, Tinker would suddenly appear from nowhere in particular, and in sheer gleefulness would surge across the pond like a racing motor-boat. As he appeared, the wild fowl would scatter, but having realized that it was only Tinker, they would dab at him as he passed, indignantly ruffling their feathers at his sudden intrusion.

But it was when the stars shone out and the gardens closed that Tinker was at his best, and often a little party of favoured visitors stood at

the water's edge and watched him at his play, surging back and forth across the ponds, now at their feet, now forty yards away, uttering the while his strange clucking notes of delight as he whirled and splashed. He could, when he chose, swim without a ripple, gliding like an eel across the water, but sometimes he splashed just for the fun of the thing.

Tinker—I suppose they called him that after the Highland gipsy tinkers, who are such great wanderers—came to know the storks and the pelicans and the night herons, and all the hundred other children of the Zoo. He knew that the bears would charge after him when he showed himself, but he had no fear of them. Often he hunted frogs in the water ditch on the safe side of the lion cubs' palings, and he seemed to take a delight in watching the young lions rush from point to point after him, moaning and snarling. When first he came he had been terrified of these great people, but now he learnt that whereas he was free to wander over the grounds, each one of them was limited to its own small area.

So for almost three years Tinker lived his strange life, a self-appointed inmate of the great Zoological Gardens, and it certainly was a wonderful place. Some nights everything was silent; none of the wild beasts was astir in their great arenas. Other nights the whole mysterious grounds were a ghost world of sound and ghostly

forms, coming and going, moving and gliding. It was during one of the silent nights that Tinker made his way into the stronghold of the polar bears, where he often went in search of their leavings. It happened that the water in the concrete pond was to-night lower than usual, and Tinker slipped into the pond without thinking, evidently, how he was to get back. Finding no food, he tried to climb out, but could not mount the wet and slippery concrete. He was a prisoner in the bears' pond!

Early next morning there was a great upheaval, for the polar bears had discovered the otter imprisoned in their quarters. The head keeper was sent for, but nothing could be done. The secretary hurried up, but he could make no suggestion. The pond was not more than forty feet in length and twenty or so in width, and the two bears were systematically trying to catch the nimble little trespasser. Hither and thither they chased him, above and below, but there was one point at which Tinker could rise, only his nose showing above the surface, where the bears could not reach him, and where he could regain his breath.

The otter was becoming exhausted, and so were the bears. Tinker had bitten one of them, and its nose was streaming blood, but how they dashed up and down, up and down, in savage pursuit of him, and how nimble the otter was, how cleverly he escaped them!

At length a bright idea occurred to one of the

keepers. A fire hose was fetched, and a torrent of water roared from the long pipe into the pond. Up and up its level rose, till the surface was almost to the brink, and—now, Tinker, now is your chance! Tinker saw it, and made a desperate dash for the only point at which he could escape from the pond. Eagerly he clawed his way up, but he was so exhausted that one of the bears would have struck him down had he not flung himself back into the water. Again they surged up and down, but now it was the old keeper who was holding the fire hydrant. He was watching very intently, and suddenly he gave a sharp call: “Tinker! Tinker!” At the sound of it the otter turned again, and dashed again for the only way out. The man was standing there with hose ready, and as the bears charged up, he directed the stinging blast of water into their faces. They were surprised and hung back, and next moment Tinker was squirming up between the bars at the feet of his old human friend.

Safe? Yes, he was safe at last. He had put up a splendid fight, and now he was free. There on the gravel path he lay, panting heavily, while round him the keepers gathered, and the old keeper even dared to caress his coat.

But that night Tinker left the gardens. He had made many good friends there, but evidently he realized that after all it was not a very safe place for a wild otter.

OLD JOCK

The Lame Swan

It was a dull November morning when the grey old town awoke to find a lame swan reposing in the centre of the thoroughfare opposite the inn. Whence he had come and how he came to be there no one knew, but it was guessed that during last night's gale he had flown into the Doctor's aerial, or collided with a chimney pot, falling to the street. Yet, save for his injured leg, he was quite unruffled, and as the light improved, and the curious crowd gathered, the bird ate a hearty breakfast of bread-and-milk. During the excitement the Doctor chanced to pass. He told the crowd to place the injured bird on a shutter and convey it to his surgery, where he would decide upon the best course.

The examination revealed a broken leg, which was very soon in splints, whereafter the bird was placed on the greensward under the French windows behind the Doctor's house.

The Doctor's garden ran down to the river, and Jock, the swan, managed to gain the water unnoticed, and an hour or so later he was back

in his resting-place opposite the inn. Being a swan, Jock chose the very middle of the road, and such traffic as there was, including the mail van, had to manœuvre round him. Shouting, whip-cracking, and hooting had no effect whatever upon Jock, and when finally he had been removed on a shovel to a less inconvenient point, he promptly squirmed back.

But in time everyone became used to it. Jock had made up his mind that that particular square yard in the centre of the road was the one and only place for him, and nothing would induce him to change his mind.

At the dusk of each evening, Jock would make his way to an outhouse behind the inn, and there pack himself comfortably between some empty boxes.

But the old swan was making other friends. Many of the children came some distance to school, and brought their little luncheon baskets with them, the contents of which Jock was ever ready to share. He loved above all else the home-made cheese and the gingerbread many of the children brought, and it was a pretty sight to see the little people gathered round the graceful bird.

Jock's leg was steadily healing. He was now able to hobble about a little, and it was discovered that the Doctor, who had been a good friend to him, had nevertheless made a bad enemy. At the sight of him, Jock's neck feathers would bristle,

and if the Doctor continued to approach, the swan would get up, clearly intent on sending him about his business.

By spring the swan was quite on his legs again, and he rediscovered the river and made his home on an island opposite the Doctor's garden. That little island was quite a bird stronghold, for each year several moorhens, one or two pairs of oystercatchers, a pair of kingfishers, and a pair of wild duck, together with sandpipers and wagtails, nested there. Jock was a curious bird, as are many individual swans, and though on the mainland he was always friendly towards humans—excepting the Doctor—he strongly objected to human trespass on the island.

All that summer the old swan lived an idle, happy life, appearing at the inn each day when the children were free at lunch, and spending the remainder of his time cruising round the island.

But Jock had not yet made friends with the Doctor. Regularly he went to the windows of other houses whose gardens bordered the river, but never to the Doctor's house. If he chanced to meet the Doctor he would stroll disgustedly out of the way, and if the Doctor proceeded in that direction Jock would turn savagely about, and there was nothing for it but for him to choose a different route.

Soon the cold winds began to blow, and Jock, instead of choosing the most sheltered thickets

of his island on which to roost, chose its exposed centre. There, high and conspicuous, he would tuck himself up each evening, and one day the Doctor, watching through his glasses, saw a lame moorhen—a very lame moorhen, for one of its legs was dangling—drag itself out of the water and hop over to the place at which the swan was lying. There, without hesitation, it dived under one of the wings of the big white bird, and thus the two settled themselves. Later the one-legged moorhen took to visiting the town street in Jock's company. It became so tame that it, too, would take food from the hands of the children, and through that winter the strange friendship continued, the swan shielding the weaker bird from wind and storm, and even breaking up for it morsels of food given by the children. Perhaps it was the recollection of his own lame days which made old Jock so kind.

One dark night in January the Doctor was awakened by strange noises in the downstairs rooms. He went down, but at first could find nothing. He did, however, discover that he had left one of the French windows unlatched, whereupon he set to work to make a more thorough search of the house.

Exactly what happened he did not know. He heard a slight sound in the darkness behind him, but before he could turn, he was aware of a crashing blow. How long he lay unconscious was

uncertain, but when he came round, the house was deadly still, though for some minutes he had not the strength or the courage to rise. At length he reached the telephone, and a few minutes later the police were in the house.

Yes, the thief had been successful, for most of the old silver which the doctor had been collecting for years was gone, and the Doctor himself was suffering from concussion.

At daybreak, however, a discovery was made. On the river bank at the bottom of the garden, a bag containing the stolen property was found. To it was attached a cord, which led out into the water, and what had happened was clear. Fearing to make his exit by the street after the disturbance, the burglar had departed by the garden, whence two routes were open to him. He could go to left or right across the gardens of the other houses, which might contain dogs, or he could cross the river and gain the open country on the other side. He had chosen the latter—to swim across to the island, thus breaking his journey, then on, dragging his spoils after him once he was safely landed. The island was littered with feathers—swan feathers, and at the water's edge lay old Jock.

He, too, was suffering from concussion, but the trampled ground all round showed that he had not gone out without a fight. It was evidently during his encounter with the swan, on

whose island he had trespassed, that the thief had lost the end of the line he was taking with him, and, fearing to return after the hubbub, he had swum on to safety, leaving old Jock where he lay, and the booty on the opposite shore.

Jock was taken to the house, and while the nurse nursed the doctor, the Doctor nursed old Jock, and so for many days the two might have been seen side by side on the lawn, the Doctor reclining in a deck-chair, Jock basking at his feet. And even to-day you may see them thus any bright evening, the old, white-haired citizen and the old, old swan, for many years the closest of friends.



THE WARNING

And how the Vixen took it

His day's work done, George Sedgewood was sitting on the rustic seat at the foot of his garden, when he saw something moving across the river, about three hundred yards away, and becoming curious he walked at length to the end of the orchard to gain a better view.

He saw a vixen lying at the mouth of a rabbit burrow—which evidently she had enlarged—and playing with her cubs, much as a cat might play with its kittens. They made a very pretty picture, the little foxes swarming over their mother's shoulders, but Sedgewood owned a small duck farm containing many valuable birds, which were the pride of his life, and he was horrified to find so notorious a criminal rearing her family at his very threshold—surprised that so far his precious ducks had come to no harm. For Sedgewood did not know that Reynard is too wise to invite destruction from his next-door neighbours; that he or she prefers to go farther afield and to poach on the home range of another fox, which thereafter has to face the music. Had Sedgewood known it, his ducks were far safer from that vixen

and her mate than were the ducks and fowls of a homestead two or three miles away. Other foxes might slay his ducks, but not the one which had made its home next door to him.

Presently Sedgewood called to his housekeeper, and, giving her the glasses, he bade her watch while he got to work. He started up his car, and five minutes later he was at the keeper's house. In another five minutes the keeper, complete with terriers and shot gun, was in the car, and they were speeding over the bridge which crossed the river a mile higher up. Thence the road ran behind the pasture containing the foxes, but the vixen paid no heed to the passing car, though she must have heard it, for she was used to the sound of traffic along the byway.

The men drove straight past, then in the next field they followed a stream, and so gained the shelter of the river bank. Here Sedgewood took charge of the dogs, and the keeper crept on under the high sandy bank in which the sand martins were nesting. Let it be understood that this was not a hunting shire, and the keeper's hope was first to shoot the vixen, after which the terriers, sent into the earth, would quickly dispatch the cubs. There was no breeze to betray the men, and, protected by the high sandy bank, the keeper could approach standing upright within fifty feet of the fox earth, when an abrupt turn would render her visible.

Had the keeper been content to walk upright he might have achieved his aim, but, because he was a born hunter, he chose to stoop like an Indian on the war-path, which at once roused the suspicions of the sandpipers. They, too, had their chicks at this season, and so their soft, low whistle of warning began to spread up and down the river bank.

The vixen ceased to play with her cubs, and though she did not move from the den mouth, up went her big ears, and her amber eyes were all alert. She looked this way and that, and when a cub grabbed one of her ears, she shook him off roughly, and stood up.

Just then a curlew came flying up the river, banking and twisting. She, too, saw the keeper, and instantly she dipped, swooping over the man's head, with her wild alarm. Then she rocketed skywards, and the keeper guessed that the game was up. A little farther on the curlew saw the vixen and her cubs, and she actually turned and went back, swooping within a yard of her russet enemy, and shrieking wildly. The vixen was not slow in taking the hint. The curlew had distinctly told her that danger was afoot, and she would not ignore the warning.

Only the woman with the glasses across the river saw what happened next. She saw the vixen turn sharply about and trot over to a huge bramble on the other side of the wash-out, her

cubs following her, and as the last cub vanished into the bramble, the keeper appeared round the corner, his gun half-way to his shoulder.

He searched long and carefully, but not a living thing stirred in the wash-out, so eventually he rose and waved to Sedgewood to come along with the dogs.

The terriers were turned into the earth, three of them, at different points of the warren. Sedgewood listened at the mouth of the earth. Presently he said:

“ I can hear one of them giving tongue. Sounds like Meg.”

They exchanged places, and the keeper listened. “ It’s not Meg, it’s Bran,” said he. “ Seems he’s got the fox at the end of the hole, and can’t get at her. We’ll have to dig.”

Sedgewood went home for spades, and they started to dig. Darkness fell, and with the darkness came a miserable drizzle. They dug till after midnight, when their progress was stopped by a huge boulder.

“ That’s what was holding him up,” said the keeper. “ The vixen and the cubs will be behind the rock.”

They both peered into the warren. A lamp was lowered, and the keeper hung head downwards for a better view. He expected to behold the phosphorescent eyes of the vixen not a yard away, but instead he beheld something jammed between

the boulders which caused him to draw his breath. He stretched out his hand and touched the obstacle.

"A hedgehog!" he gasped. "A blinking old hedgehog! That's what Bran was after!"

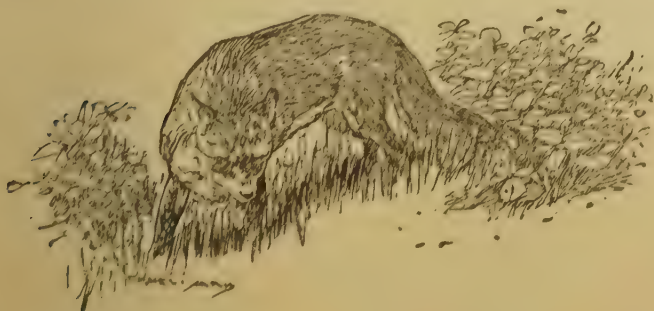
A night or two later Sedgewood and the keeper chanced to meet in the village.

"Seen any more of the foxes?" asked the keeper in an undertone.

"No," Sedgewood answered. "I haven't seen them, but five of my best ducks were found dead by the pond this morning. Just killed, and their heads carried off, the bodies being left as though by a piece of impudence. That's a fox, isn't it?"

The keeper nodded. "I reckon so," he agreed. "Rather a vixen. A bit of vixen spite, that!" said he.

And both of them realized how badly they had been fooled.



ONE GOOD TURN

The Racoon that made a Fortune

Steth Porter was on his way to the beach in the hope of spearing some fish for supper, but as he left the forest edge he saw something—some animals—moving on the timber-strewn sands about a mile from him. What the creatures were he could not make out, but there were two adults, evidently the parents, and three small cubs. Whatever they were, they were behaving strangely, the parents and two of the cubs running back and forth, while the third cub appeared to have found something which pleased him, for he would not leave it. Possibly they were playing some kind of game, but since the tide was rising, Steth had no time to waste if he were to get down to the low-water lagoons.

So the man commenced his fishing, and soon forgot the strange animals, but chance took him in their direction, and when next he looked up they were still in sight. Evidently they had seen him, for the parents were in great distress. First one then the other would stand over the cub, then move towards the bush, looking round for

him to follow, and when he did not do so the parents would return for another effort.

Steth, at any rate, knew that why it did not follow was because it could not. What was holding it he could not as yet see, but he hurried up to investigate. The parents made off as he drew near, and he could hear their querulous, grunting squeals answering those of the cub long after they had gone from view.

It was an unexpected scene which met Steth's eyes. On the wet sands, which were trodden into a puddle all round him, was a baby racoon. One of its forepaws was held, as though in a steel trap, by a giant oyster. Evidently the cub had thrust its forepaw into the gaping shell, which instantly had closed and trapped it. The man reached down, taking the cub in one hand and the oyster in the other. So firmly was the oyster anchored that Steth could not dislodge it till he took his knife and severed the anchor. Then he managed to lever the shell open, but the young coon's leg was completely crushed.

Steth saw that to let the little animal go in its mangled state would be cruel, so he took it home, amputated the useless member, stitched up the stump, and having fed the coon on condensed milk, put it to bed in the wood oven.

Next morning Mrs. Porter peered into the box and announced that the coon was breathing evenly. Four days later it was hobbling about the cabin

on three legs. The stump was almost healed, and the little animal was in good spirits. He spent the fifth morning rummaging about the cabin. On the sixth he climbed to the curtain pole and brought down the whole concern, and on the seventh he was hobbling after his mistress about the homestead as she attended to her duties.

He managed to get on wonderfully well without the missing leg. Much of his time he spent on the roof of the cabin, and it so happened that a swarm of wild honey bees had their nest on the sunny side of the stone chimney. Little Monty, as they called him, could smell the honey, and he worried about that nest for two whole days. On the third day he tried to dislodge it, and was stung on the tip of his nose by the queen of all the bees. At this he fled, crying, into the house, but after Mrs. Porter had rubbed his nose with the blue-bag, he sat a while thinking it out.

Then Monty resolutely climbed back to the roof of the cabin, and once more attacked the bees' nest. This time he dislodged the whole structure, but thanks to his thick, bear-like fur and the fact that he had sense to keep his stump firmly pressed against his nose, he was not stung again. The nest fell to the ground, and for one luxurious hour Monty lived, munching, swallowing, munching!

A day or two later Steth was at his work when he heard a sound which at first he took to be the

hooting of an owl. He was surprised at this, for there were not many owls in that part of Canada. Guided by the sound, Steth ambled into the woods, and found Monty, seated in the fork of a basswood, six feet from the ground, staring towards its extremity, the stump of his missing paw firmly pressed to his nose. Evidently he could not climb any higher, so he sat and howled. Steth was about to drag the little rascal down, when he perceived a ceaseless stream of bees pouring back and forth through a hole ten feet or so above Monty's head. Honey? Yes, more honey!

Steth thought they might as well have their share of the loot this time, so after sunset he went back to the basswood. With his axe he cut a hole through its outer shell near the base, then, lighting a torch of paper, he thrust it in, and the rotten pulp inside the tree began to smoulder. When the grey smoke began to creep out of the hole, Steth felled the rotten trunk. As it fell it split open, and Steth saw, to his delight, that the tree was veritably full of honey. His wife came along to lend a hand, and when they had taken the best of the honey—and without a sting, since all the bees were stupefied by the smoke—there was still enough clinging to the wood to provide an excellent meal for Monty.

Mrs. Porter strained the honey into jars, and luck was with them, for it happened that a few days later a party of tourists chanced to be passing



MONTY THE HONEY-FINDER



and called for a meal. They were treated to some of the honey, and one of the men, a prosperous provision merchant, was much interested in it. He said it was the best he had ever tasted, and before leaving he informed Mrs. Porter that he would be prepared to purchase as much honey as she could provide.

The following day was a Sunday, and the two took Monty for a walk into the woods. They located no less than four bees' nests within a half-mile radius of the cabin, and to each of them Monty had led them without a waver from the direct path!

Thus the distant provision merchant received his first consignment, and his cheque came by return, together with a note to the effect that he hoped for more. The amount was equal to last year's total earnings from the ranch, and on receipt of it the two young people sat in silence and gazed at the cub.

So far Monty had, on each occasion, been rewarded for his find by being left to clean up the litter after they had taken the bulk. This was really good pay, but apparently he himself did not think that the reward was good enough, and a day or two later, Steth, busy with his hoe, heard the familiar owl call not eighty yards away. There, sure enough, was another bees' nest in a hollow tree, at the foot of which sat Monty. Ten minutes later Steth and his wife were busily

at work, and neither of them noticed that the cub had sauntered off, which was quite contrary to his usual habit when there was honey about. Possibly he had found another nest which he could reach, for there was not a sound of him. So the two went home, and there, on the table, sat Monty, his head enveloped in the last wooden bucket which Mrs. Porter had been in the act of filling. He was covered with honey all over, and his little tummy was blown out like a barrel!

There is not much more to tell. Those who live in that part of the world have at least heard of Coon Brand Honey, sold in tins, in jars, and in wooden buckets, and obtainable at any provision store; but there are not many who know how the prosperous bee ranch, now covering many acres, came into existence.



THE TRUMPET CALL

The Story of a Pair of Geese

It was an April evening. We had left spring behind us on leaving the valley, and here, in the moors, it was winter still. Every hollow was white-rifted; a wild wind raged, with occasional stinging showers, but as we topped the first stony ridge of the occupation road, I heard a sound wilder still, the clarion call of geese, or of a goose as it happened. It bore the wild triumph of the stormcock's song, aloft and aloof above the storm, a golden thread in winter's sombre fabric, and it voiced the conquering glory of the spring.

Stark and grim, beyond the wind-swept loch, stood Windydoors, our destination, whence the sound came.

"You keep geese, then," I observed, more by way of making conversation with my driver than in thirst for information.

He nodded. "Two," he said. "That's the old steg (gander) you hear."

"He's got a penetrating voice, anyway," I observed. "Evidently he feels the spring, though he can't see it."

“Aye,” agreed my companion. He urged and whipped the old horse on the down grade. On the third assault she shuffled into an easy trot, and my pilot went on—“Yes, that’s the old steg. He’s kind of uneasy because his mate is locked up in the calf house. That’s why he’s shouting.”

“Why did you lock her up?” I asked. “Not done anything wrong, I hope?”

He gave me a quick glance, then looked down at my city clothing forgivingly. “Sitting,” he assured me. “Kitty reckons she’ll make something out this year, but I don’t hold no faith. Five addled eggs last spring, and three dazed goslings which died within the week. I reckons nothing of geese.”

So I summed things up. “Jane”—as I came to know her later—had completed her clutch of eggs. The farm girl, collecting each egg as laid, had yesterday made a nest in the calf house for Jane, where her eggs were placed under her, and there she was now proceeding with duties even more leisurely than the ordinary course of her life.

During the days which followed I became better acquainted with Jane and Billy. All day and every day I saw Billy standing about or pacing up and down opposite the calf-house door, on the other side of which Jane was sitting. Not a hen was allowed near the place, and even the sheep dogs were hissed and clattered out by that

vigilant sentry. Every now and then Billy would pause to mutter sweet nothings under the door, and Jane would answer him as the fit took her. Then Billy would peep through a crack in the door, by means of which he could just see the stern quarters of his Best Beloved as she sat her eggs, and temporarily satisfied, he would resume his sentry go.

At sundown Billy was driven into the cow house next door, where at any rate he could carry on a conversation with Jane through the wall; and one night a fox yapped. Instantly there was an immense hubbub among the dogs, and I heard one of them, glad of an excuse, chasing one of the farm cats till the latter ran up a damson tree.

Thereafter Billy, fearful for his wife's welfare, made the remainder of the night hideous—beating his wings against the door, trumpeting, cackling, and when he was liberated next morning, he dashed straight to the calf-house door, and talked long and soothingly to Jane, one eye against the crack all the time.

So for thirty-one days Billy kept his vigil, and then, to the intense disappointment of all, only one egg chipped. There was now no getting away from the fact that though the union between Jane and Billy seemed entirely happy, it was not to be a particularly fruitful affair. Last year they had produced four goslings out of nine, and not one of the four had lived. This year here was

only one, and a sad little thing he was as he waddled slowly and for the first time out into the cobbled yard at his proud mother's heels.

They were, indeed, a pathetic trio during the days that followed, father and mother waddling contentedly, and each with one eye on their chick. Of all our birds, wild or tame, the geese are the most solicitous and gentle as regards their young, and the pathos of that little farmyard scene was added to by the knowledge that the little fluffy gosling was not normal. He had begun life at a handicap, for he had no brothers and sisters. Thus he was an unnatural chick, but over and above this, since he was a goose, his solitude very much reduced his chances of survival. Normally, young grass is cut and placed on the backs of the little goslings, and so they learn to eat by pecking the grass off their own backs and from the backs of their brothers and sisters. Kitty tried all sorts of means to induce the solitary little fellow to take his food, but when on the fourth day she induced him to accept some dainty from her hand, the triumph culminated in tragedy.

For the little gosling, having swallowed the morsel, at once fell over on to his back, kicking grotesquely. His parents, calling and entreating, prodded him with their beaks, trying to restore him to his feet, both of them with wings outspread, mingling their agitation with the girl's. Eventually Kitty took the tiny creature in her arms and

carried it into the house. The oven and warm flannel were tried, but the little life just flitted away as nature had intended, and as we knew it must. When Kitty went out an hour later, she found both geese still awaiting her at the door, looking up into her face with sad but hopeful inquiry.

That evening it was decided that Jane must go back to the farm at the other end of the loch, owned by a brother of the tenant of Windydoors, and when, during the few days that followed, I saw old Billy and his mate moping side by side in the nettle bed, Billy trying occasionally to cheer her by nibbling her scalp, my heart was heavy for them. For I knew that they were mated for life, and that the promised separation would be a sad blow to each and both.

But so it came about. One day old Jane was cornered and carried off under the arm of a shepherd. That evening Billy called and called. He peeped through the crack in the calf-house door, he waddled at immense pains down to the loch margin, he sought the nettle bed again and again. But Jane was gone.

For a time Billy lived a sad and sedentary life. Each evening he let forth the wild trumpet call. Maybe his wife heard him, for the prevailing wind was from him to her, but she was four miles away, and he at any rate did not hear her answering call. So the wild April gales blew themselves out, May

came with its swallows and its sandpipers. The wild fowl on the loch below were never silent day or night.

One golden morning I was astir early. Somewhere a cuckoo was calling. There was not a breath of wind. The swallows flew in and out of the cart shed. Ned, the cowboy, whistled merrily. I strolled leisurely across the cobbled yard and let old Billy out. He seemed to take in the glory of the new-born day, then he mounted the dung-hill, spread his wings, and sent forth the wild, high, clarion call.

Faint and far the answer came. It was like an answering bugle call. Billy paused and listened. Again that faint ghost answer. He called again and yet again. Many geese seemed to be answering, and I left him still calling on his aloof and solitary perch.

All his life Billy had never ventured more than fifty yards from the homestead. There Jane and he had lived, and a very small home range had supplied their needs. The great wide loch had never held any attractions for her or for him. The frivolous ducks loved it. Every morning they were in such a hurry to get there that they had no time for breakfast at home. With the two geese it was different. They had lived for home and each other.

But that morning we beheld a surprising spectacle—old Billy, the sedate, the home lover,

flying frenziedly down the moorland face, to land eventually with a splash among the quarrelsome wild fowl at least a hundred yards from the shore. Kitty reckoned it meant another stormy spell, my erstwhile pilot thought t'old goose had taken leave of his senses, the dairy woman prophesied a sudden death in the household, and all eyes were turned upon me, the probable bearer of deadly disease from the city's million microbes!

For a long time Billy was missing. No one cared very much, for he was not a valuable bird. One day, perhaps a fortnight after his disappearance, I was out fishing on the loch, when, as our boat neared the little pine-capped island a mile from the nearest shore, I saw a goose, which looked very much like our goose, doing sentry-go along the narrow water front. He did not seem to appreciate our proximity, so we left him alone. Water birds of all kinds bred on that island.

And so my joyous holiday in those wild, free lands drew near its close.

Bob, my pilot, had harnessed the gig. Kitty hoped I had enjoyed my holiday, and assured me that I looked a different man. Lady, the sheep dog, stood with her forefeet on my thigh. Bob was anxious to be off, possessing all a countryman's dread of missing trains, but he shouted suddenly, pointing with the whip: "What's this coming up the loch road?" The old horse shied

on perceiving that weapon behind her blinkers. We all looked.

“Why, bless me!” cried Kitty, clapping her hands. She climbed to a corner of the stone trough. “Bless me if it isn’t Billy and Jane, and—yes, thirteen—fourteen goslings!”

And it was. They had hatched them on the island.



PRICKLES

The Story of a Hedgehog

It was late summer, and one starlight night the gardener's boy was returning from stoking the greenhouse furnaces when there rose from one shadowy corner of the garden a harsh and vicious squalling, midway between a cat-call and the screaming of a rabbit. Never in his life had the boy heard anything like it, and his thoughts turning in the direction of foxes, badgers, and the like, he armed himself with a storm lantern and a spade, and went forth to investigate.

There, in the corner of the old stone wall, firmly held by one foot in a rusty rat-trap, set months ago and now forgotten, was nothing more formidable than Prickles, a hedgehog, rolled into a tight bundle on perceiving the light.

The boy placed his foot upon the spring, but he saw that the hedgehog's paw was badly damaged by the cruel jaws. He was a kindly lad, so he took Prickles home, and with some difficulty bathed and bandaged the wounded leg. The hedgehog was then placed in a rabbit hutch with an abundance of clean straw, and there he lived many days, fed liberally on bread and milk.

The wounded foot healed up in miraculously short time, and with its healing Prickles gradually lost his distrust of human beings. At first he would just roll up, his quills bristling in every conceivable direction, so that it was impossible to touch him without encountering a needle point, but later he would take food from Joe's hand, and would lay his prickles flat, all pointing astern, at the touch of the boy's hand.

One day Joe discovered a very curious trick on the part of his strange pet, for, as he laid the hedgehog on its back so that the poor leg could be examined, a straw came in contact with one of Prickles's hind feet just below the pad. Thereupon Prickles struck up a high-pitched fretful cry, like no other sound on earth, keeping it up so long as the straw continued to tickle him. He did not seem to mind being tickled, indeed his submission suggested that he rather liked it, but he just had to scream. Thereafter anyone taken to see the hedgehog was treated to a song, which never failed to produce much merriment.

But Joe's mother was becoming rather tired of providing bread and milk for the creature of the hedgerows, and since the hedgehog's foot was now good enough for ordinary use, Prickles was restored to the garden.

Daybreak and dusk were the hedgehog's hunting hours, and any evening one might have seen

the strange little beast ambling along the gravel walks, or trickling in and out among the rose bushes and over the grass plots, seemingly as devoid of any sense of direction as a clock-work mouse. Normally he progressed at an easy trot, but his legs were so short and the quills and the coarse hair surrounding them so long, that he gave one the impression of being mounted on little wheels, though occasionally he would pick himself up and run with surprising agility. One of these displays was witnessed at dusk by Joe. A chance visitor to the garden was the huge tortoiseshell stable cat, which looked in when he thought it time to inspect mousing conditions about the furnace-house. He was a poaching brute, death on rabbits, and had even been known to kill stoats and weasels. This particular evening he had taken up a warm couch on the wall of the heating shed when Prickles appeared below, trickling in and out among the rose bushes. The cat flattened, the boy watched, the hedgehog came obviously on. Pussy waited till Prickles was directly below, then he leaped, or rather he dropped.

There is no doubt that the tortoiseshell mistook the hedgehog for a rabbit. There is no doubt, also, that he would never make the same mistake again. In the twinkling of an eye Prickles shut up, his head down, his spines protruding rigidly in every direction, and on to those spines pussy

alighted with the force intended to shatter the life out of his hapless victim.

With one agonized screech the cat shot off, shaking his head and sneezing, while Prickles promptly uncurled and fled, with equal quickness, into a succulent peony plant. Thus when the cat paused at the end of the walk to lick his paws and to glance maliciously back, there was nothing of Prickles to be seen, nor was the cat ever again known to visit the garden.

Pussy, indeed, was no longer needed, for Prickles himself learnt that the boiler-house was a very happy hunting-ground. I cannot believe that he killed all the mice which had harboured there for generations past, but I do know that ere he had been established very long, the mice simply left the place. Not one remained.

That Prickles was paying his footing in other ways was abundantly clear. The furnace-house had always been swarming with cockroaches, which probably did very little harm, though nobody liked them. Nobody, that is, save Prickles, who set to work systematically and industriously to make inroads on their numbers. That he was going the right way entirely to clear the place Joe and William were convinced.

So the Indian summer drifted by with its floating gossamer, its drifting leaves, its wonderful scents, and its atmosphere of quiet repose. A cold spell came, and Prickles, evidently finding his

coat of quills too cool—for one could see his naked flesh between the spines—mounted the ruined wall in the centre of the garden, and fell therefrom into a deep bed of leaves collected at the bottom of it. It may have been just an idle fellow's fun, but at all events each fall resulted in his obtaining a fresh overcoat of leaves, the second layer to become impaled ramming the first layer home, and so on, till his prickles were a mass of leaves from his skin outwards. Thus equipped Prickles could afford to laugh at the winds, while the driving rains merely dripped from the outer covering without even penetrating to the second layer.

But it seemed that Prickles was in no laughing mood, for as the weather became colder and colder, he became more and more listless. Nothing of the clock-work mouse about him now. Fat and lubbardly, he rustled slowly and noisily from point to point, so dull-witted that he would amble up to one's feet, then twitch into a ball on finding suddenly that he was in danger of being stepped upon.

One day, after Prickles had not been seen for a week or more, Joe, nosing about an old ruin in the garden, discovered, to his curiosity, a huge ball of dry fine grass stowed away in a sheltered corner. Eagerly he unravelled it, when, in the very centre of the ball, he found Prickles, curled up snugly for his winter sleep.

The boy had no desire to upset the plans of his

old friend, so he left things much as he had found them; but that would not do for Prickles, for when next Joe peeped in, the nest was trailed across the floor, and Prickles was gone. Prickles had flown!

Then one day some time later William was clearing the south wall of an old creeper, densely matted with dead leaves, when he made a discovery. Pulling out bushels of dusty leaves, he found, six feet up from the ground, Mr. Prickles, snugly packed away on a platform of leaves, secure from snow and wind.

Prickles was left where he fell with the falling of his sanctuary, and a week later the under gardener, inadvertently leaving his jacket on one of the garden paths, found the hedgehog curled up inside it. Prickles was promptly ejected, but the gardener kept in his potting-shed a tangled bundle of what he called "raf"—that is, the strong dried grass used for tying plants and flowers. One day this was dropped into a corner, and when redeemed it was found that Prickles was hibernating in the centre of it. So he was again turned out. For Prickles it was a very disturbed winter!

In the south wall of the garden was a door which led directly into the garage, thence to the stables. One day someone left this door open, and next morning Prickles was found comfortably curled up in a thick rug which had, carelessly, been thrown into a corner. He was returned to the garden, but thrice he was again ejected from the

potting-shed and once he was almost shovelled into the furnace, having decided, as a final resort, to hibernate among the coke.

“Drat that 'edge'og!” Joe one day heard William remark. “Next time I find him, I'll dig a hole four feet deep and bury him for good.”

This was too much for Joe. The horrors of being buried alive haunted such dreams as were Joe's lot. He had a spare rabbit hutch, and Prickles would not need bread and milk at this time of year. Abundant straw would supply his requirements, so the boy set to work to find Prickles, and when he found him he packed him into the rabbit hutch, firmly wedged with straw. And there Prickles slept for the remainder of the winter, till the kindly spring called his brothers and sisters back to the world of activity.



THE PIONEERS

A Musk-rat Incident

It was the month of April when the two musk-rats arrived at Sunny Pond, and from the first it was clear that they had come to stay. Let it be clearly understood that the musk-rat is in no way related to the house rat. He is a quiet vegetarian of the Canadian swamps, and in character and habits has much in common with the beaver. Sunny Pond, where the two musk-rats had come to live, was not more than thirty feet across, overshadowed on its north side by a dense growth of poplars, through which the slender stems of the Golden Rod fought for sunshine. It was one of those hidden-away corners of the woods which Nature seems to reserve for her peace-loving citizens, and it would seem that long ago an earlier generation of musk-rats had lived and flourished there.

This was very convenient for the new-comers, for they found a home already made for them, though it sadly needed repairs. They set to work at once, and when they rested during the days and nights that followed, no man can say. The

mouth of the old burrow was nine inches below the surface of the water, and ran off into the hard clay bank on the south side of the pond. Evidently the water had stood at a higher level in the days of the previous occupants, for every musk-rat knows that nine inches of water above the entrance hole is insufficient. So the musk-rats set to work and dug another hole nine inches lower still. They dug vertically, till it joined the existing passage-way, then with weeds and clay they cleverly plastered up the old hole, so that it resembled the solid bank. By the time this was completed, the margin was dotted over with the star-like footprints of the two rodents, and as the sun sank to its setting, they sat side by side on a partly submerged log, nibbling each other's faces in the most loving fashion.

The rats had now a bank burrow in which to live, for the entrance under water ran up into the bank, where there was a spacious chamber, and since this was provided with only one entrance, and that under water, it will be realized that it would contain no air. Therefore the previous owners of the house had made a ventilation shaft, which had been just a tiny little hole running straight up from the chamber and out into the open air. This hole was so small that a mouse could hardly have squeezed into it, and one might wonder how the rats had engineered it. Evidently they had first of all made a passage-way through

which they could creep, then, working backwards, they had plastered up the hole behind them, leaving only the tiny air shaft. The weather, however, had washed it in, and now the hole was so big that even their dreaded enemy, the mink, might have squeezed through it. So, to save work, the two rats repaired it from the outside, that is, they covered it up with a great pile of sticks through which the rain would not enter, though air might circulate. This, you will admit, was very clever of them.

The next thing was to replaster the bedroom, and this done, the two musk-rats had a safe and cosy home.

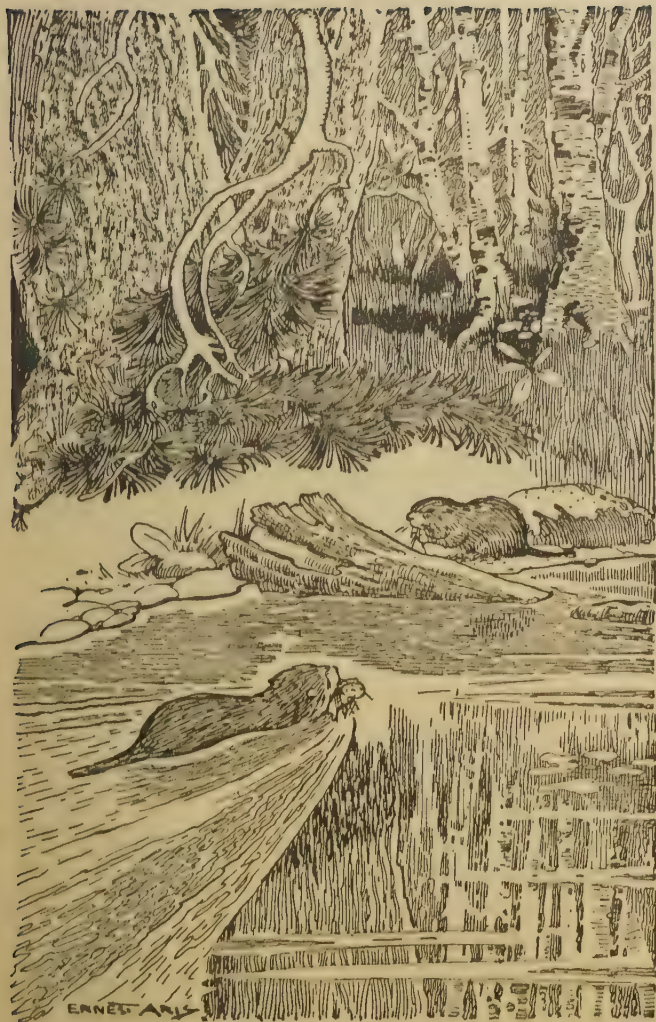
So far they had worked side by side, seldom more than a yard apart, but that golden May evening they rested from their toil. They sat on the partly submerged log, grooming their coats, and it was a long lingering twilight, gold and purple, fresh with the song of birds and the hum of insects.

After this we lose sight of the female musk-rat for a long time, and for her husband these were idle days. Where he lived I do not know. Perhaps he spent his evenings in bachelor bliss with the old woodchuck who lived under a log nearby, though had he taken a proper interest in the world surrounding him, the time might have passed lightly enough. The whole woods were responding to the wakening touch of spring, which

was affecting every living creature in one way or another. The old woodchuck, as though aware that his idle life was making him too fat, took to climbing up and down a tree stump, with much loud grunting. The whitetail deer, looming gracefully through the birches, was to be seen at dawn running in fairy rings with the wide-eyed mottled fawn which had so recently come into the world.

At length the female musquash turned up again. She rose from the very centre of the pond, holding in her mouth a tussling, kicking little ball of fur, and in the middle of the pool she left the little one to fend for himself. He swam gamely to the bank, and sat there shivering and blinking, while his mother dived, and presently she reappeared with a second youngster, then a third and a fourth and a fifth, till in a few minutes eight young muskrats, each of a soft baby roundness, were distributed, shivering and unhappy, about the margin of the pond. Four of them joined their father on the log, and the other four looked as though they wished they were there but feared to make the plunge.

Soon the young rats could swim as well as their father and mother, and in a very short time their babyhood days slipped from them. They were just as industrious as their parents, and no family of boys and girls ever lived together in more perfect harmony. Day and night now the silence was broken at intervals by the sharp "smack"



THE MUSQUASH FAMILY

alarm signal of a musquash striking the water with its tail as it dived. When the two parents were alone, this smack system of signalling danger was of little practical use beyond the possibility of its startling an intruder, but now its full value became evident. Often when the male rat was mounting sentry on the log, his wife and some of the children were swimming below the surface, and any ordinary alarm would not have reached them. The smack system, however, conveyed the tidings not only to those above the surface but also to those beneath it, thus preventing their rising haphazard in the face of an enemy. One wonders whether they had learnt the trick from the beavers.

But the year was getting on, and one day a new idea seemed to occur to the mother muskrat, and she set to work at once on their winter home. Under the shelter of the trees, where the water was about twelve inches deep, they began to collect together a heap of mud and decayed rushes, till eventually a round island was formed, an island about three feet in width and growing each day till eventually it protruded three feet above the surface. This stage reached, the two adult rats gnawed a vertical passage into the bottom of the heap, twelve inches below the surface. They extended the shaft upwards above high-water level, then in the centre of the dome they hollowed out a chamber, much like the bank chamber in which they had dwelt all summer.

In this case, however, there was no need for a ventilation shaft, the great pile of sticks being porous enough to admit sufficient air. And so, in addition to the bank burrow, the musk-rats had their lodge in which they were to live all winter.

At the other side of the pond the father musk-rat constructed a floating raft of reeds, which he anchored to the bed of the pond, and by the time this was done the sun was going south and the nights becoming chilly, and one evening a blizzard swept the swamp, followed by an intense calm. When morning came, the pond was frozen over, and thereafter, day and night, the ice steadily increased in thickness. The iron hand of winter was upon the land, but inside the lodge it was as cosy and snug as any children's nursery.

We see now why the musk-rats had been so particular to have the mouths of their burrows so far below the surface. Had they been near the surface, the ice would have sealed them up, and the rats would have become prisoners in their dwellings, but as it was, they were free to move back and forth under the ice in the unfrozen depths of the pool. Nor were they prisoners under the ice, for the floating raft, anchored by its reed hawser, moved constantly in the breeze, and so it kept the water open immediately surrounding it, and by this raft the rats could come and go. Thus had these industrious people provided for

themselves against the long cold months of that north country, and all winter they lived their lives unseen, unknown to their enemies, warm in their winter lodge and screened from the hungry eyes of the Wild by the very snow and ice which to many was so cruel a foe.



JONATHAN

A Bear Cub

Five weeks had passed since the little black bear cub and his big shaggy mother left the ice-bound den in which, deep under the snows, the cub was born, and since then they had wandered in the steps of tens of thousands of their kind. This evening they swung along one of their deeply trodden paths, and every here and there were the information bureaux of the black bear race, where each in passing can read the record of the bear ahead, and leave its own record if so it choose. The mother bear never failed to pause for the latest news at these places, but this evening she did not leave her own record there.

The tree was a soft-barked aspen, and there was precious little bark left about its trunk. For twelve feet up or more the messages of bears who had passed were deeply scored—the marks of their claws and teeth. Jonathan's mother sniffed the trunk and bristled. She did not so much as touch it with her big wet nose, but she began to growl and back away. And because his mother bristled and growled, Jonathan also bristled and

growled, then they stole silently away from the place.

Thus they came ere long to a deep little valley, and in the centre of it, fifty yards away, something which might have been a lighter-coloured boulder than the rest lay in the shadows on top of a cairn of boulders. It was a bear like themselves, but it was twice the size of Jonathan's mother, and lighter in coat—a grizzly!

The mother bear, having seen, crept stealthily away, and once out of ear-shot she began to run, nosing her cub ahead and spanking him mercilessly so that he would not forget. Thus she impressed upon him that when a grizzly appeared it was time to get a hustle on, and indeed he was not likely to forget the lesson. For two hours they fled from the presence of the mighty bear, and his mother spanked him most of the way.

That evening two woodsmen had omitted to extinguish their fire ere they left camp, and a portion of their tent now lay smouldering among the ashes. The breeze caught it, and very soon there was a lively little fire, which licked up into the timber, then—away she went. Next minute there was a booming and crashing as of exploding dynamite.

When the mother bear smelt the smoke and heard the flames crashing through the timber, she started off downwind, just as fast as Jonathan could travel, which was not very fast, since

Jonathan was cuddling an empty fruit can which the men had left. In many ways she was a good and devoted mother, but now, face to face with the living terror of her dreams, she all but forgot Jonathan. Finding himself left behind, he squealed like a little pig and dropped his treasured can, but when his mother, ten yards ahead, disappeared from view, he did a very foolish thing. He turned back in the direction they had come, and so Jonathan lost his mother.

Many bear cubs lose their mothers during forest fires, and most of these cubs perish, as Jonathan would have perished but for a stroke of luck. He tumbled head over heels into a deep wash-out, and down that wash-out an endless stream was passing—squirrels, martens, a mother white-tail and her fawn, wood hares by the hundred, each paying no heed to the rest in the presence of the fire fiend. Jonathan did not move with them, because he was looking for his mother. He tried to run against them and across them, but he was knocked over and trodden on. His nose was bleeding, and a hornet, furious at the disturbance, had stung him in the ear, and, all things considered, Jonathan was in no end of a mess.

But there appeared down the wash-out two creatures larger than the rest, and they ran so noisily that Jonathan decided to hold them up. He contrived to get under the feet of the fore-

most, tripping him. The man looked down at the forlorn little cub, and snatching him by the loose skin of the shoulders, swung him under one arm, then proceeded down the gorge at his companion's heels.

Less than a mile away they came to the water. The men waded out, knee-deep, through a scum of squirrels and wood hares, and twenty feet from the margin sat down and removed their jackets for use as fire shields. For three hours they gasped and groaned for breath, but when the worst was over, and they crept, shivering, to the smouldering bank, the woodsman still held the living Jonathan under one arm. He put him down, and the two men went off through the smouldering bush, while Jonathan was too dazed to follow. The men themselves were in a dilemma, for their kit was gone, and they had lost their pack pony.

The following morning the two men were wakened by their lost pony pounding round their camp in the bush. Both of them leapt up at the welcome sound, and then they saw that a very small black bear cub was chasing the pony. What he meant to do with it if he caught it I do not know, but he was hardly likely to catch it, since he was falling and somersaulting over everything. So one of the men caught the horse, while the other pinned down the cub.

"We'll keep him," they decided. So a cord was made fast round Jonathan's neck, and he was

tied to a tree with a length of wire. As dusk began to settle Jonathan howled and hullabalooed so tremendously that the woodsmen took him farther from camp and tied him up afresh. Where Jonathan's mother was gone there was no telling. She did not hear him calling her. Had she been within a radius of three miles she must surely have heard him, for another heard, and came with silent massive step to see.

When Jonathan saw the grizzly coming through the timber towards him, he crouched flat on the ground, his small wet nose between his forepaws. The grizzly came up and sniffed at Jonathan, whereupon he sprawled on his back, his paws aspiring limply skywards. He was so obviously an infant, the other so immense, that even the stark and blackened trees seemed to be waiting in breathless pity to see what would happen.

But at first nothing happened. Had Jonathan's mother been hovering round, the grizzly would certainly have slain the cub, but now the great monster stared towards the place where the men were sleeping, then again she sniffed the cub. She sniffed him from end to end, she sniffed the cord about his neck, which bore the taint of human hands, she sniffed along the strand of wire which held him captive to the tree. Then she lay down beside Jonathan, held him between her forepaws, and nosing out the cord round his neck, she bit

it through—not to free him, maybe. She could hardly have reasoned that out, but the cord smelt of man, and therefore she hated it. After that she licked Jonathan and caressed him, then she rose to go her way, and Jonathan, his fears forgotten, rose to follow.

But the grizzly turned with naked fangs to strike him down, and Jonathan, having learnt some little wisdom, turned and ran.

The following day his mother found him. She fell upon him savagely from a poplar thicket, and having pinned him down she spanked him soundly. Then she took him away to a very muddy place, and rolled him and daubed him and splattered him in the mud—this to kill the man scent and the grizzly scent which clung to his coat. After that they turned their faces to quite another part of the forest, travelling by those deeply trodden bear paths which are older than the trails of man.



VAN AND KEEWIT

The Lapwings

Van and Keewit, the two parent lapwings, were among the earliest birds to nest that year, and they chose the bleak and open pasture-land above the village, where even the tussocks were too low and wind-beaten to afford much shelter. They had the pasture almost to themselves, and so little cover was there that it was not difficult to watch the pair by the aid of field-glasses.

Van, the male bird, was all eagerness to get their little home under way, though Keewit, from her lackadaisical and indifferent manner, seemed to think there was no hurry. Van would pivot and bow like a wooden toy, showing off his russet tail feathers, erecting his gorgeous crest, and at length Keewit hollowed out a nest. It was the crudest affair one could imagine, the merest scratching in the short grass, and I was never sure whether the half-dozen strands of dry grass which formed its lining were carried there by the hen bird or whether they blew in by accident.

The following day broke dark and windy, but the wan light revealed one egg in Keewit's nest.

It was a surprisingly large egg for the size of the bird, thick at one end, but tapering off to a point, and in colour it was mottled olive grey; rather a beautiful egg in its way, and to the two lapwings it was the dearest thing on earth. Van wanted to sit on it, but his wife would not let him go near, chasing him with open beak, and clearly showing him that it was no business of his.

At the end of three days there were four eggs in the nest, and one saw the reason for their remarkable shape; as I have said, they were large for the size of the bird, and had they been oval, Keewit could never have covered them. As it was, they fitted into a neat little square, their sharp ends inwards, and it was surprising how inconspicuous they were till one stood directly over them.

Keewit would have begun at once to incubate her treasures, but no doubt you have heard of the "Teachit Storm". Once it was believed that the lapwings, or teachits, brought in their wake a great storm, for at about the time of their arrival in the hills the tail-end storm of winter is due. Often it is one of the fiercest storms of the year, and it broke in the night which found Keewit's clutch complete.

Poor Keewit! She stuck to her treasured eggs till she was coated with ice, then the fury of the storm swept her clean away. All the time Van was flying from point to point, his wild cries borne

on the blackness of the gale, and when at length his wife joined him, both were half dead from exhaustion. Evidently they lost their bearings, for there was a light at the window of the tiny cottage away down the road, and the baby was wakened by a lapwing beating itself against the glass and screaming as though to plead shelter from the storm.

“Poor things!” said the woman. “They must be near beaten to death a night like this!”

But the storm blew itself out before dawn, leaving a weary and branch-strewn earth revealed by the first pale sunbeams.

How fresh and clear and beautiful it was that morning, with a taste of real spring in the air! Keewit's eggs had been chilled by the snow, and it was really lucky for her that the farm boy found them and bore them off, or she would have wasted many days sitting on the barren clutch. As it was, she was no worse off than the other lapwings which had chosen to nest in the sheltered bottoms; for succeeding the storm the floodwaters came and swept thousands of eggs to destruction. Later we found numbers of them lying among the drift which marked the high-water line of the floods.

Keewit and Van did not waste time mourning their loss. They made their way to the next pasture, and close to the ruined house, where patches of bulrush grew here and there, they

made another nest. It happened that Keewit's choice was a lucky one, for there was a bull in that field who could not be trusted. Thus the village boys, who were constantly on the look-out for plover eggs at this season, wisely steered clear of the place, and Keewit and her friends were left undisturbed.

Keewit laid only three eggs this time, and within ten days of losing her first clutch she was sitting again. In many respects she was a clever bird, for if she saw anyone approaching her nest she would leave her eggs while the intruder was still some distance away, and, running eighty yards or so, she would rise into the air with a piercing scream, so as to make believe her nest was at that point.

One night, while on her eggs, Keewit all but lost her life. On towards midnight the ever-vigilant curlews, away up the hillside, began to utter their shrill warning, and from the sound of it one knew that Reynard was abroad. One could follow the course he took, indeed, by their wild shrieking, then suddenly the noise ceased and quietude fell. For ten minutes or more there was silence, and the fox was all but forgotten, when Keewit saw something move not five paces from her. It was Reynard, sliding silently out of the drain by which he had progressed down the mountain face!

Keewit saw a flash of red eyes, and in an instant

she was up and away, uttering a piercing shriek. Next moment the swamp seemed to take fire with alarmed voices, while overhead in the darkness, everywhere, one could hear the flapping of wings. And how that fox showed his white fangs when he saw that his little game was spoilt!

The following day two of Keewit's eggs hatched out. The third never hatched, and was left in the nest for the crows. Beautiful, bright-eyed little things the newly hatched chicks were, tiny atoms of fluff which, an hour or so after their birth, were stumbling after their mother on clumsy baby legs. Keewit went slowly, uttering a soft, plaintive call which was clearly a mother note, one eye on her little brood, the other on that sinister drain. The sun shone and a warm wind blew, and all the earth seemed radiant and brimming, while overhead flew Van, looking down at them, and calling, calling, urging his wife to the uttermost caution.

The chicks throve rapidly, and ere long they could reproduce a feeble version of their parents' wild "Kee-witt" call. It was about this time that their mother met with a sad misfortune which, but for a lucky chance, might easily have sealed her fate. Searching for food with her chicks, her foot one day encountered a wisp of sheep's wool, which became tightly entangled about her toes, so that she could no longer run about and had great difficulty in rising. The

result was that she was unable to obtain food for herself and her little ones, and but that they, in their hunger, attached themselves to their father, they, too, would have starved.

The keeper happened to be crossing the field when he noticed a lapwing stumbling and fluttering away at his approach. He pointed out the bird to his retriever, which at once ran after her, and Keewit realized the first real terror of her life. Unable to escape, she flung herself flat, resigned to her fate, and the gentle retriever took her in his jaws, and carried her unharmed back to his master.

The man had no quarrel with the lapwings, and holding Keewit between his knees, he carefully unwrapped the cruel wool from about her toes till not a vestige of it remained; then he gave her back her liberty, and Keewit, dazed with terror, staggered drunkenly away. But that night she again took her chicks under her wings, and very quickly her poor feet healed.

One evening I was down at the pastures, when I saw two young lapwings standing together on a little green hillock—rather forlornly, so I thought. They seemed to be looking at something, and that something, I made out through my glasses, was their mother, sitting on the very nest in which they were born. As I watched her she poked her head under her wing, and I knew then that there were eggs in the nest.

But presently the male bird flew down and alighted near the chicks, and both of them made off after him as fast as their legs would carry them. So they vanished into the misty light, following their father, as they had followed him during those sad days when Keewit was unable to tend their needs.



GAD'S DAY IN TOWN

The Record of a Red Squirrel's Outing

Each morning Gad, the red squirrel, and his wife—at least I presume she was his wife from the manner in which she pulled his hair—were accustomed to journeying up the wood to a small brook where a particularly succulent water weed was to be found, and this morning, as usual, Gad led the way, closely followed by his best beloved. There, in the centre of the wood, there was little indication of the strong wind that was blowing, but down the very centre of the wood ran a public thoroughfare, along which a veritable tornado was raging. Gad led the way by the old familiar branches, passing from tree to tree by the same leaps and bridges as on the day previously and for many days preceding that, till he came at length to a leap wider than the rest, overhanging the roadway of which mention has been made.

Just as Gad reached this point there sounded up the road the strident hoot of a car's horn, but whether it was this, or the wind, or whether it was his wife just behind him, shrieking contradictory advice and grabbing hysterically at his

hair, I am unable to say. Gad hesitated, ran back, then, in a moment of panic, decided to leap.

Now it requires very pretty judgment on a squirrel's part to allow exactly for wind and the movement of the branches for which he is aiming, and for the first time in his life Gad made a boss shot. He grabbed frantically for the branch, caught only a leaf, and went spinning downwards towards the white highway. He fell a matter of eighteen feet, and a moment later was lying in the dust—a limp and huddled heap.

When the car came up, its occupants saw the apparently dead squirrel lying in the road, while round it, with tail erect, still chattering futile orders and equally futile advice, scampered its mate.

She made off as the driver stopped the car and dismounted. The man had children at home, and he handed the pretty little creature to his wife to be taken back to show the baby. So the woman put Gad among her furs, and a minute later he was being whirled off towards a distant city, the like of which had never entered his leaf-strewn dreams.

Just as the car entered the city traffic an hour or so later, the woman suddenly declared that she had felt Gad move. They pulled him out—he opened one eye and yawned. A few minutes later he was placed on the dining-room table and given some brandy. He seemed to revive a little,

so they gave him some more. Then the eldest daughter of the house wrapped him up in a bit of an old silk petticoat, put him in a wicker basket, and placed the basket in the warm sunshine close to the kitchen door.

When Gad had slept off the brandy he disengaged himself from his pall and looked at the cat, which was lying next to him. The sight of that cat was enough for Gad. He let forth one splutter of horror and shot up the spout, a minute or two later finding himself on the eaves of the house.

It was very much of a town house, surrounded by others of its kind, each with its small, unfruitful garden, where black, grime-covered trees vied with such mundane household necessities as boxes and buckets and questionable clothing hung out to dry. Many years had elapsed since last a wild squirrel looked out across that corner of God's earth—years which had seen the coming of the car and the railway, leaving it soiled and trampled, and with human voices raised above the roar of hurrying wheels.

For some time Gad hid behind a chimney pot, appalled and dazed, and there, at any rate, the same sun shone upon him and the same wind ruffled the russet of his coat. He did not know how narrowly he had escaped a life of captivity and sorrow—one which would have been mercifully short, for even now it was borne in upon

him that to remain here and to live was impossible. So he made off at his best speed, running along the tiles. Once he peered over the apex of the roof, and saw the bustling thoroughfare on the other side. The sight of it smote him with new horror, and he backed away and scuttled off, jibbering his puny threats at the hustling pedestrians, at the noisy traffic, but most of all at a huge red flag fluttering from a balcony directly below.

No doubt the position of the sun helped Gad in his sense of direction, for he was heading due north, in which direction, far enough away, was his wife and his dear home wood. Very soon he came to the end of the row of houses. To proceed farther now was impossible without crossing a narrow garden and beyond it a busy side-road. One or two pedestrians had already seen him, and a man whistled and clapped his hands. Gad shot down into the dense creeper clothing the wall below, and within its friendly shelter he rested a while and worked things out.

Gad was essentially a creature of the day, and it would never have occurred to him to wait till nightfall. Now, from his new hiding he saw that by running down the garden he could gain a low tree, from the upper branches of which it would be possible to leap on to the mast of an aerial and thence to the iron-work of a red railway bridge spanning the road. Of course, he did not know

it was an aerial nor yet a railway bridge; he did not know what it was, but at all events it would enable him to cross that hideous road without braving the people.

Nimbly Gad slid to earth, and set off down the garden plot towards the tree. Then the real horrors of the day began in earnest, for scarcely was he half-way down when a huge dog ran out of the house and charged after him, barking and growling horribly. He ran as he had never run before, not even when his wife was after him, gaining the tree with inches, rather than feet, to spare—too scared now to swear. He gained the railway bridge, and began to scuttle across along the edge of a girder. Below him were the people and the horrible traffic, but worse—far worse than that—some terrible monster had evidently seen him, and now, with a roar and an ear-splitting scream, it was after him. Gad felt the very earth shake as the express train dashed out on to the bridge, then with a last despairing shriek he loosened his hold and flopped.

It was a blind flop, but a lucky one, for Gad landed spread-eagle in the middle of an elderly lady's hat. The newspaper which that evening devoted a whole page to Gad's escapade, ventured the suggestion that the famished animal was attracted to the hat by the bunch of crimson cherries suspended temptingly from its crown, but it is doubtful whether anything was farther from

Gad's mind than cherries. For a moment he clung in the midst of the little oasis, then he was clawed out of it and fell with a flop to the pavement.

Naturally Gad made for the nearest tree, but the tree, alas, turned out to be a drain ventilator! It was a vertical pipe about twelve feet in height and fitted at its topmost extremity with a globular bird-cage affair. Gad reached the bird-cage and clung to it, flattened like a leaf, and no doubt hoping that no one had seen him.

Naturally a crowd assembled. The woman with the cherries in her hat shook her umbrella at him. A small boy threw a ball at him, and that was the general signal. Caps, paper, mud, anything the street urchins could lay hands on, were hurled at the unhappy Gad, who, finding himself the centre of the hostile barrage, completely lost his nerve. Even his wife would have lost her nerve under such conditions.

What he did was very much to the mark, though it cannot be pretended that he deserved any special credit for it. His bravery was the bravery of utter panic, for he leapt straight and true for the nearest urchin, landed fair and square, and hung on by his teeth to the extreme tip of the youngster's nose!

Instantly the band of warriors dispersed, leaving the unhappy one to his fate.

Gad saw the opening, and leapt. He found himself in the centre of the road, no tree near,

and -oh horror!—another thunderous monster was bearing down upon him, this time a huge steam pantechnicon!

There, in the centre of the road, with hostile crowds on either side, little Gad braced himself to meet the assault, and if it proved within his power, to repel it.

To run away was beyond him. He had no run left. He was cornered, and now he turned to fight and perhaps to die.

The monster came on, the driver grinning. He expected the tiny creature to get out of the way, but instead Gad leapt to meet the approaching foe. He alighted on the hot steelwork and clung to it.

A moment later he was scrambling up, past the driver, over the heap of coal, on to the crowded roof of the lorry body. The man stopped his engine and looked round. Gad could not be seen, and a boy shouted that he was on the roof.

As a matter of fact Gad, with eyes tightly shut, was jammed between an upturned perambulator and a foot bath, and there he meant to remain.

The driver had a long way to go, and was in no mood to waste time in the crowded thoroughfare. So he turned on the steam again, and the huge vehicle lumbered on through the crowded streets. And just then a policeman strode up to see what all the disturbance was about.

For hours Gad journeyed on, till at length, as the twilight began to deepen, the jolting suddenly ceased and the clanking of machinery ceased with it.

He peered out from his hiding—overhead were branches, branches which seemed half familiar. He heard men's voices as the driver and his assistant got out the hose to fill their water tank at the stream, then cautiously he slid down.

The stream! Yes, so far as Gad knew, there was only one stream on earth. By it he had been born, and had lived his short life. He had seen much during the last few hours, but it did not occur to him as being at all wonderful that he should find himself back at this place of all places. Nor, as he sped hurriedly away by the old familiar branches, was he in the least surprised to see his wife coming towards him, and in no end of a



tear at his being so late. Of course she would want to know just where he had been, but -- would she believe him? Would she believe Gad's wonderful story? Of that I am doubtful.

CORBO

The Tame Raven

The keeper fired both barrels, and two of the ravens fell. So the man climbed down, well satisfied with his labours, and among the boulders below he found the two young ravens. One was quite dead, but the other was only slightly injured in one wing. It sat back and struck at him, but he dropped his hat over it, and took it alive.

There was an aviary at the mansion house, and the golden eagle which for many years had occupied it had died the previous winter. So Corbo was placed in the big wire cage, and his wound soon healed. But it left the wing crippled, so that he would never be able to fly any distance.

Corbo was left to the charge of Jimmy, the stable-boy, whose chief purpose in life seemed to consist of annoying other people, and in this Corbo was soon to prove a very capable apprentice. He would sit on Jimmy's shoulder and rub his head on the boy's neck, and he learnt to jump through a hoop with a practised skill which seemed to suggest that his trainer found ample time for amusements other than his work. If anyone else

held the hoop, Corbo would seize it in his strong bill and strive angrily to wrest it from his grasp, for he would perform that trick for no one but Jimmy.

The youth had acquired the habit of leaving the aviary door open, so that Corbo had free run of the stable yards. This suited Corbo very well; also it suited Jimmy to a nicety, because no one else approved of it. The chauffeur and the gardener had excellent reasons for disapproving of it, as we shall see later, but Jimmy did not like the chauffeur, and the gardener he regarded as his deadliest foe.

Thus, having come to own the place, Corbo soon manifested other characteristics, all of which apparently sprang from the same prolific fountain of example. While polishing the harness or cleaning the knives, Jimmy would sometimes punctuate his eternal hissing by uttering a strange kissing sound between his lips. The first time he did this was one morning when the gardener's daughter was crossing the yard with the daily ration of milk. According to Jimmy's views the girl was a tell-tale, and anyway, she had red hair! And when Jimmy "kissed", Corbo jumped down from the bench, and, with one ungainly hop, made for the girl's ankles. His strong sable bill was a formidable weapon, and the girl went home with a torn stocking, and with precious little milk in her can.

It is strange how a bird or animal often attunes

its likes and dislikes to those of its master. Jimmy's other pet about the place was old Toby, the cocker spaniel, who was now too old to hunt, and who spent his days about the stable yard. Toby and Jimmy loved each other with a very great love, but fortunately that power is not limited in its scope, and now Corbo came to be included in the mutual bond. He would lean up against Toby by the harness-house door in the most sentimental manner imaginable, and usually they fed from the same bowl—the real sign of friendship—without a word of disagreement. It is true that a dog will share his meal with a cat he does not love, but that is simply because he thinks that he is eating the cat's food, whereas Toby and Corbo would actually exchange morsels when they mutually benefited thereby.

One day the chauffeur had his engine to bits, and numerous little pieces were spread out on an old rug by the garage door. Then Corbo hopped lightly in, picked up the brightest article, and hopped away with it. Presently he returned for another bit, and the chauffeur, who was underneath the car, little guessed what was going on. On the bird's third visit, however, the man espied him hopping off with something in his beak.

There ensued a deadly chase, to which Toby and Jimmy lent more noise than assistance, and when finally Corbo was beaten out of the shrubbery, he had lost the article. The task of finding it

among the laurels was clearly a hopeless one, and when the chauffeur, looking through his parts, discovered that two other vital bits were missing, there was the very dickens of a row.

The outcome of this was that the car was stalled for several days till the new parts arrived from the factory. The laird, of course, blamed the chauffeur, who quite plausibly shunted it on to Jimmy for letting the raven out. Here the gardener chimed in, for one of the laird's hobbies consisted of keeping a weird and wonderful collection of fancy ducks, of which the gardener had charge. There was a pond adjacent to the stable, which was given over to them, and every effort was being made to induce the birds to nest. These efforts were just showing signs of success, but, as the gardener pointed out, ravens are notorious egg thieves, and one visit from Mr. Corbo might result in great damage to the more valuable birds. The laird had a soft place for Jimmy, whose father had served him well. This Jimmy knew, and I blush to record that the boy was not above trading upon it. Still, the order went forth that Corbo was to be kept in his cage, and though Jimmy faithfully fulfilled it, he took to cleaning the knives and the boots and performing other odd tasks inside the cage, Corbo and Toby his close attendants.

In a fortnight or so the whole affair had fizzled out, and Corbo was quite forgotten. Then it was

that the wire netting in one corner of the cage acquired a weakness, and Corbo got out. Of course, no one could blame Jimmy for it, and the inquiry: "Why don't you put him back?" met with the obvious retort: "Put him back yourself." Somehow no one seemed keen on the undertaking. Perhaps it was not worth while.

That evening the gardener turned up with a hammer and galvanized staples, but Corbo did not seem to regard the repair as necessary, and the man went home with one finger copiously swathed and the job only half completed.

Next morning Corbo distinguished himself to an unusual extent, and came deservedly near to winning the respect and favour of the whole establishment. There was a great hubbub among the ducks, clearly indicating that something was amiss, and as everyone within hearing ran to the place, there was Corbo performing strange evolutions in the centre of a train of priceless ducklings. He appeared to have pinned one of them down, and was now hammering at it mercilessly with his sable bill.

Jimmy's heart stood still as he saw the gardener clutch a club and run to the spot. The club was raised to deal the fatal blow when the man paused, and stood looking down. It was not a duckling at all which Corbo had killed, but a stoat, which might, indeed, have laid the whole place waste but for the wise bird's timely intervention.

But, alas! the lustre of heroism soon began to fade, for Corbo had not enjoyed his legitimate liberty very long when things began to disappear. The lady of the house was one day sewing in the garden when Corbo sneaked up under the seat and startled her nearly out of her wits by stealing the silver thimble from her finger. The chauffeur complained of losing all his small tools, and indeed oddments of all kinds were disappearing wholesale. Clearly Corbo had a secret store somewhere, and though he was closely watched he took good care not to betray its whereabouts. But the fact of having a thief of this kind about the place opened up new avenues for thieves of another sort, and when small silver and even jewellery began to go—ultimately to be found carefully wrapped among a servant's possessions—no one could believe that Corbo was exclusively to blame. But the chauffeur *did* believe that Jimmy was to blame for the disappearance of a nickel-plated shifting spanner, which the boy had long envied for his cycle, and told him so.

So Corbo's cage was repaired and generally overhauled, and when next the door was closed not even an ostrich could have escaped from within.

Things went uneventfully till one night Jimmy went home with an attack of influenza. He was

away some days, and in the interval Jimmy's minor duties fell to no one in particular. Toby was singularly well able to look after his own requirements, but poor Corbo in his cage was in an entirely different street. No one cared very much if the raven starved, indeed those who might have fed him would have welcomed his departure. It was so easy to neglect him when no one in particular was responsible for his needs; the chauffeur had nothing to do with feeding the live stock, the coachman had enough on hand with his horses, and since the aviary was in the stable yard, it was out of the gardener's range of responsibility.

Corbo croaked a good deal the first two or three days, beating himself against the wires. On the fourth day he ate most of the feathers out of his tail, but on the fifth he just sulked. His eyes had lost some of their lustre, his plumage had lost its sheen; and the laird, passing by, thought that the bird was missing the boy, and loved the boy the more for it.

On the evening of the sixth day Jimmy, in his bed, heard a knock at the door. He knew that his mother had gone to the village, so he called out from his room, and next moment a little breathless girl with red hair and a darned stocking was at his bedside.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" she panted. "They've none of them fed the raven! He's starving!"

"Thank you, Cissie," Jimmy answered.

Jimmy was a very sick boy, but he got up and went out. And in the dusk of evening the laird, on his way to the stable, met a little, scantily-attired figure staggering drunkenly down the gravel walk, a big black bird under his arm.

"Jimmy! What on earth are you doing here, Jimmy?"

The boy looked up at him, half ashamed, half smiling.

"They forgot to feed Corbo, sir," he said, "and I was taking him home."

Then he collapsed into his master's arms.

A little while later it was decided that Corbo should have a new cage on the sunny side of the yard—chiefly because the site of the old one was to be absorbed by an extension to the green-houses. And when it came to pulling his old cage to bits, they found, under a crack in the boarded floor, a strange assortment of tarnished goods, including a nickel-plated shifting spanner and a silver thimble.

GUY'S PET FAWN

The Tale of a Red Deer

The boys were playing football in the village field, when a little red deer fawn scampered out of the fir planting near, and ran from one to another, clearly searching for its mother. What had become of her no one was ever to know, and meanwhile the boys, enjoying the company of so unusual a playmate, proceeded to keep the ball rolling, amidst roars of laughter at the little creature's antics. One of them, a fair-haired, bright-eyed youngster, allowed the fawn to suck his fingers, at which another remarked:

"You've done it now, Guy. You'll no' get rid of him after that."

This proved to be the case, for from that moment on the fawn stuck closely to Guy M'Kay's heels.

"Anyway, Sandy M'Gill," quoth Guy, "if you kick yon ball at him again I'll down ye."

But Sandy M'Gill *did* kick the ball again, and this time actually knocked the fawn's legs from under it, at which it bleated plaintively.

In a moment Guy had the other boy down and was pummelling him most unmercifully, while the

fawn stood looking on, and little guessed that his newly acquired friend was fighting for him.

“Well, I’ll foot it through the planting and ower the brae,” said Guy, when it came to going-home time. “If his mother’s still living she’ll surely be around there, and I’ll hear her.”

So Guy searched the bracken slope and the burn edge, hoping that he would *not* find the mother, and truly his hopes were fulfilled. He arrived home at the edge of dark, and walked into the house with the fawn still at his heels. Merrily he laughed at his mother’s surprise.

“And he’ll no’ leave me, Mither, ye ken!” he told her.

“I ken weel ye dinna want him to,” she answered, for truly it was no uncommon thing for Guy to arrive home with some strange creature of the woods.

An old feeding-bottle was rooted out of a bottom drawer, and Guy fed the fawn by the kitchen fire till it would drink no more. Then it was given a bed of shavings in an outhouse, and the door was left open so that if the mother came—and Guy’s mother felt sure she would—she could lead her offspring away.

During the days which followed, the fawn was quite content to lie still where Guy had left it, and such were its natural instincts to hide where it was left that if a dog came along it would stretch out

its neck flat along the ground and never so much as blink an eyelid. Then, hearing Guy's voice, it would scramble up and bleat; and so for some days it never left the outhouse. This stage duly passed, and thereafter the little animal became more interesting every day, and it was not very long before it took to accompanying Guy to school each morning. This practice, the fawn soon learnt, was to invite the attention of the village dogs, and sighting a dog, he would at once dive through the hedge or leap the wall, remaining on the far side till the dog was past. Always he returned home when the village was reached.

One morning the fawn, returning from his trip to the schoolhouse, hit upon the idea of galloping full tilt into the kitchen. Mrs. M'Kay had just baked a batch of scones, and the oven tray was standing with its company on the scullery table. The fawn caught one corner of the tray, and sent the whole lot spinning.

Mrs. M'Kay, standing at that moment kettle in hand, was startled by the clatter, and, before she had time to think, she had flung round with the kettle to "shoo" the intruder out of the house. The kettle caught a protruding corner, the lid flew off, and the fawn received half the scalding contents of the vessel across his face.

What a scene followed! The little deer cried like a child, and running out, it sought the shallow water of the loch, where it rolled and plunged,

while Mrs. M'Kay padded after it in her carpet slippers. Uppermost in her mind was the thought: "What will Guy think of his mother?" But at length she got the fawn into a corner. She poured oil over the scald, then she rubbed it with flour to "take out the fire"; but as she applied the treatment the hair came off, and she was mortified to find the wound looking worse than ever.

But Guy smiled into his mother's face.

"It wasna' your fault, Mither," he said; "and he'll soon be all right again." So perhaps it was worth while after all, for many a time Guy's mother recalled her son's bright smile and his generous forgiveness, and such memories live as long as life's scars.

When at length the new hair began to grow, it was white as mountain snow—a broad belt across the face and down the right flank of the fawn. Thus for life he was marked among his fellows, a sign by which all might know him, and later he became known as the White-faced Hart.

When we take into our keeping a creature which belongs by nature to the woods, its wild instincts are sooner or later bound to show, and that autumn the fawn knocked down a little girl who teased him with some gingerbread. Thus Guy was told that his pet must be returned to the hill, so he went to the laird to see what was to be done about it.

"What will I do, sir?" he asked. "If I turn him

loose this side of the range he'll be home within two hours."

The laird thought awhile, then he said: "Listen now, laddie. Bright and early the morn's morning you start out with the fawn for Loch Vault. It's a muckle step for ye, but maybe ye'll make it by the late forenoon. I shall be there fishing, and ye can wait in the old boathouse. We'll take the fawn away up the loch into the Braenther Forest, a matter of thirty-five miles from here; so I don't think he'll find his way home. Ye can come back in the car with me."

So with the first signs of daybreak Guy was away by the hill road, the fawn following, and mainly at a jog-trot—though they paused often to drink at the burns—the boy covered the eighteen miles into the heart of the hills before midday. From Loch Vault a series of lochs lay across the range, linked together by narrow channels, and when the laird and Sandy, his gillie, arrived, the poor fawn, for the first time in his life, was subjected to the humiliation of having his legs tied. Then he was placed in the stern of the old white motor-boat, where, his head resting on Guy's knees, he certainly seemed to be quite content.

It was a stormy day, and hither and thither across the great green sheet the catspaws ran. Sandy, giving the starting handle a heave, started up the rusty engine, at which the boat lurched

forward and bumped a submerged stake—an incident about which they thought little at the time. The wind was behind them, and rapidly the pine-girt margin glided astern, much to the fawn's surprise.

The loch was here about three miles in width, and scarcely had they made a mile when Guy became aware that his feet were turning uncommonly cold, and looking down he saw that he was up to the ankles in oily water. At first he did not realize that anything was wrong, then he noticed water spurting up between the floor-boards just behind the engine.

"Look, sir!" cried Guy, pointing; and as the laird looked a startled expression came into his eyes. He went quickly over and pulled up the floor-boards, cap in hand, intending to stop the leak if he could by stuffing his cap into it. But next moment a cry of dismay broke from his lips.

"She's sprung her whole length, Sandy!" he exclaimed. "Pull her round for the nearest point."

With a practised eye Sandy measured their surroundings for the nearest landing-place, then he swung round the wheel; but as the launch turned with her nose into the wind, she seemed to stop and shudder. It meant the loss of precious seconds, on which their lives might depend, but Sandy again swung her round for the distant shore;

for better two miles with the wind than one mile against it.

The laird, meantime, was doing his best to stop the leak; but he seemed to be making things worse. "Guy," he said, "cut the fawn loose. He may as well have a swim for his money, same as the rest of us."

He spoke coolly, smiling into the boy's face. "I've already done so, sir," said Guy; and as the laird looked into his eyes, he was refreshed by the sudden thought that before him was a real man.

Then the laird did what was assuredly a very generous thing. For years his favourite relaxation had been fishing, and most of the waters he fished were swept by savage storms. Moreover, for some strange reason, he had always possessed a fear of drowning; but, like most brave men, he despised fear in himself, as in others, and so he had kept this natural dread a secret. But always when he went fishing on these lochs he wore under his woollen vest what has come to be termed a safety waistcoat. Now, as though acting under sudden impulse, he slipped off his jacket and his cardigan.

"Can you swim, Guy?" he asked.

"A wee bittie, sir," answered the boy.

"Then take this," said the laird, coolly handing over the patent waistcoat. "We're going to sink, and you'll need it. I could easily swim ashore from here," he added lightly.

But Guy thrust the gift aside. "Not I," said he. "I'll hold tight to the fawn. He'll tow me fine. He can swim like a wild duck, sir."

At this Sandy, grimly and without comment, held out his hand for the life-saving vest; but the laird did not offer it.

"No, Sandy," said he. "You can jolly well swim, same as the rest of us."

Just at that moment the engine stopped, and in the end no one wore the waistcoat. No one even inflated it. Sandy and the laird got down to the engine, the one attacking the sparking plug, the other the carburetter; while meantime the boat filled and filled, and Guy eventually climbed overboard into the choppy loch. To him it was more or less of a joke. Born and bred at the margin of the loch, he was accustomed to bathing daily; and he did not see any special cause for being afraid. Often that summer the fawn had accompanied him, and great games had they had in the water together. Here was an unexpected bathe out of season, and—as Guy had often longed to try as an experiment—with all one's clothes on. But Guy did not realize what lay before them.

Scarcely was the boy in the water when the fawn scrambled after him, landing with a splash. Guy gripped the little animal by the tail, and hung on, shouting to the men to follow.

"Get hold of the fawn," cried Guy. "He'll



ERVES ARIS
4.

SHOREWARDS!

tow us ashore. He can swim like a wild duck, I tell yel"

The men obeyed without question. Sandy lowered himself gingerly over the edge, gripped the fawn by the long hair of the shoulder, and hung on mercilessly. The laird made fast near to the point at which Guy had obtained his hold, and so, with the fawn swimming strongly, both Guy and the laird assisting by their own efforts, the strange company set off towards the nearest landing-place. But they had not gone very far when it became evident that Sandy, clinging desperately to the little animal's shoulders, was a deadly burden, and that, thus handicapped, the fawn would soon become exhausted; for Sandy's whole weight was tending to capsize him.

"It's yon big fellow!" gasped out Guy at length, indicating Sandy. "He needs to come away aft, or he'll capsize the lifeboat."

They yelled at Sandy to loose his grip and come farther back, but they might as well have yelled at the wind. Sandy now had both arms round the little animal's neck, and with every sea he shipped he gripped the tighter. The laird eventually went forward, gripped Sandy by the hair, and forced him to take a grip lower down; whereupon the fawn rose up in welcome relief, swimming with renewed hopes towards the shore.

Ten minutes passed, and the shore seemed no nearer. To each of the men it was thereafter a

mystery how they lived through that dreadful experience. At times they seemed to be sinking, and, as they gasped and choked, they saw the fawn lashing the surface into foam in its struggles to keep afloat under the heavy load. It seemed that hours, days, lingered by, yet the fawn fought gamely on, while with numbed and aching fingers they clung to his long coarse hair.

Their very joints seemed to be giving way, but the shore was now near at hand. The laird felt solid rock under his knees, and he rose on all fours, groping for the boy. At least he thought that he was groping for the boy, but his senses of touch and direction were gone. The fawn was lying where it had landed, so were the men; but lap by lap the wavelets were assisting them into shallower water. At length first one, then the other, dragged himself out on to dry land, and for many minutes they lay there; but luckily the wind had dropped, and the hot sun beat down upon them.

The fawn was the first to rise. He tottered up and shook himself; then, distinctly shaky about the knees, he sniffed Guy's face. Next he sniffed the face of Sandy, then, as though evil memories were recalled, he butted Sandy in the ribs and prodded him violently in the stomach.

Sandy sat up and groaned. It occurred to him that it was time to bestir himself. He was terribly cold, and fishing in his waistcoat pocket, he pro-

duced a small corked bottle full of matches. Near by was a bush full of tinder-dry drift, and Sandy set fire to it. Soon there was an immense bonfire, into the friendly glow of which he helped the other two. Some time later a very weary but thankful procession set out for the nearest farm steading; but scarcely had they left the birch grove when the fawn appeared in their wake, took a running butt at Sandy, and having bowled him over, departed again into the woods. Sandy got up with an angry exclamation.

"Serve you right!" said Guy. "That's because you nearly drowned him and the whole bang shoot of us!"

And Sandy knew that for many months to come that story would be told against him.

Thus Guy's pet fawn repaid his human friends, and the news went forth that the white-faced deer was not to be harmed by the stalkers and the sportsmen. He lives to-day, recognizable from afar by his distinctive markings; and many are the tourists who see him through their glasses, and who go their way gladdened at the sight of a great and famous beast.

So the accident with the kettle was indeed a blessing in disguise, for by its mark they know him among the many of his kind—the White-faced Hart, who must not be harmed.

THE CRUST

And its Adventures with 'Beasts and Birds

"My old molars are no good for yon, Bessie," said the angler, and he tossed the last fragment of his lunch high into the branches of the rowan which grew from the cliffs at the foot of which they sat.

"Shame on ye, Alec!" his wife rebuked him, looking up from her knitting. "If ye couldna' eat it yersel', ye should have put it back in your poke, and it would have done fine for the fowls."

The old man looked up at the crust suspended precariously in a fork twelve feet above. "The fowls of the air will get it, anyway," said he. "They're entitled to such pickings, Bessie, unless, maybe, ye want to climb for it? Or perhaps ye'd prefer to stane it down?"

But the old lady ignored his flippancy, and having leisurely lighted his pipe, he sauntered down the river, leaving Bessie to follow at her leisure with her knitting.

No sooner had the two old people disappeared than a squirrel, which had been watching them over their lunch, scrambled out along the branch

to investigate the strange article that had taken lodging there. As he obtained possession of it his wife descended upon him and endeavoured to relieve him of the responsibility of it. She pulled his hair, and bit his ear, and finally she attained her object by dint of sitting on his neck and holding him by the loose skin of his face with her hind feet, while she dragged at the crust with her hands.

So the she squirrel went to her favourite shelf with the crust, but having licked away what little butter still adhered to it, she threw it away disdainfully, and it fell back to where the old people had lunched together.

The male squirrel now perceived his chance, but ere he could clutch it there sounded a clatter of jackdaw voices, and about half a dozen of the birds got there before him. One of them bore the crust off, roundly abused by both squirrels, but, clattered by his rivals, the jackdaw who held the crust had to drop it, which only goes to prove that in the wild nobody owns anything edible till he has eaten it. The crust fell among the buttercups forty yards away, and a passing rook swerved in his flight and alighted beside it, promptly to be attacked by the jackdaws. And while they fought—a strangely bloodless contest—a family of starlings, which had been fly-catching in the grass, drew a little nearer and yet a little nearer, till finally the mother dived in,

caught up the crust, and flew off with it through the bright sunshine, her family bringing up the rear in mass formation.

So by the time the jackdaws had finished with the rook and sent him about his business, the bone of contention, if such it may be termed, was lodged in a lead gutter on top of the church tower two hundred yards away. The starlings had left it there, for the village was full of crusts for anyone who wanted such fare in these days when insects were abundant. The starlings did not, but they had had the pleasure of taking it from the jackdaws, who did not want it any more than they did—unless, of course, there happened to be a squirrel or a rook in the running as alternative owner.

The crust lay in a lead gutter, I say, under the wind-vane, and there it might have remained till time and tempest removed it—but that there really *are* such things as church rats. This one, moreover, a summer visitor, was anything but impoverished, for I fear that he was a very sinful old rat—an explorer and an adventurer. He had but one eye, and his tail was a stump two inches long. A few days ago he had climbed up a cassock, thence on to a bell rope which he mounted skilfully a matter of fifty feet. So he had gained the clock-room, whence a worm-eaten oak ladder led to the final summit; but the brown rat had ignored the ladder because the walls were hollow, and in those walls numbers of swifts and starlings and

jackdaws and even a stock-dove had nested *Had* nested, I say, and so the rat had lived by means which were not above reproach till he destroyed his own means of livelihood. Now he had the tower to himself, and he could not find the way down, so that the crust was welcome—very welcome!

He tried to drag the crust through a chink in the masonry, but it was too big, so he was faced with the alternative route—out along the projecting stone spout, with empty space below, then via a narrow stone shelf for six feet till he gained the hole in which the stock-dove had nested.

He gained the shelf all right, though the crust was a perilous burden, but he got no farther because—well, because the kestrel which lived in the jackdaw's cliff espied him, and came down with a zipp of wings.

Then the house rat did a foolish thing—perhaps because his blind eye was on the danger side. He turned to fight, and in his panic he lost his hold and fell—a sheer forty feet on to the roof of the church. He fell in company with the crust, and they bounced apart; then—believe it or not as you will—the rat got up and dived head foremost down a gutter spout, which was to take him straight to earth, and that, after all, was what he wanted.

So there the crust lay, still intact, on the lead

flashing of the church roof, but almost immediately there descended upon it a flock of sparrows. No sparrow on earth could have raised it into the air, but the united efforts of sparrows have, before to-day, achieved wonders. Thus, within ten minutes, the crust lay under the yew trees on the gravel walk, an incongruous and sorrowful emblem of poverty amidst the joyously scattered flakes of confetti left over from that morning's wedding.

It was thus that the village moocher's lurcher found the crust, and he was the best fed dog in the village. Yet his master's ways found their parallel in his own walk of life; he was an explorer of ashpits who treasured most the things which cost him nothing to obtain. So he carried the crust away and would have buried it, which was quite the best thing which could have happened to that crust, for there this story would have to end; but, on the dusty highway not far from the church gates, the lurcher was almost run over by a car. He had to drop the crust and run for his life, and the crust stuck to the wheel of the car, by which it was carried to the other end of the village, when it was hurled in a much damaged state into a mob of white Leghorns as they bolted for safety.

It was about an hour later when the two old people sauntered up the brae towards the white-walled homestead which had become their corner in life. How far the crust had travelled in the

interval I do not know, but as they neared the gate they saw one of their young cockerels, quite their fastest cockerel, since by some mischance he bore unmistakable "game" breeding, though quite the best poultry dealer in the country had guaranteed the egg from which he came pure White Orpington—they saw this cockerel, I say, the child of questionable parentage, setting the pace for the rest of the pen as he tore round the field carrying a large crust. For in the poultry yard, as in the wild, nothing edible belongs to anyone till it is duly eaten.

"Hullo!" said the old man, as the cockerel turned to meet them. "Here comes the old racehorse to meet us with the crust."

But little he guessed that the crust was the very identical one to which he jestingly referred.



THE SPRINGTIME ORPHAN

A Bear Cub that made a Friend

When Moony's mother stove in the roof of Bill Fairweather's henhouse and scattered wide its contents, justice was dealt without court or question. For Bill was a dead-sure shot even with the heavy black .450 army pattern revolver, and Moony's mother went out like the click of a man's thumb.

"Got you, old gal!" muttered Bill, tossing the empty brass cartridge case into the stove and restoring the smoking weapon to the shelf. "I had a kind of notion you were nosing around some days past, and now I've fixed you."

Bill had fired through the half-open window of his cabin, so he went out to survey the kill. He was quite sure the bear was dead, or he would not have laid aside his revolver, for even a woodland black bear is not to be slightly handled. And, yes! she was dead all right, sprawling grotesquely on her back, one of Bill's Buff Orpingtons firmly clasped to her woolly breast under one great forepaw; but Bill's elation somehow died in his throat when he saw a little black pudding of

a cub come ambling out of the bush, and run up to its dead mother.

“O-oh!” muttered Bill. “I didn’t know she had a cub, or I wouldn’t have done it.”

But there is no going back on such acts, and failing to rouse his mother, the cub ambled over to Bill, for it was too young to have any fear of man, embracing one of the woodman’s sturdy legs, looking up into his face like a child that wants to be carried. “You poor little critter!” muttered Bill. He picked up the cub and carried it into the cabin, while Jess, Bill’s dog, looked on with glances of the highest disapproval.

Bill placed a dish of scraps on the floor, and while the cub was busy with the feast he went out, and rather hurriedly dragged the dead mother away and buried her.

From that hour Bill found in his new pet an endless source of amusement, for mischievous though Moony was, that cub certainly possessed a sense of humour. He stubbornly refused to acquire wisdom by his own sad experiences, to learn that the stove was hot and that the soap was not good to eat. Day after day he rammed his little wet nose against the stove, then ran out of the cabin howling, to bury the offending member in the nice cold mud of the creek margin. Day after day he tried to eat the soap, till eventually he lay down in a lather of his own vexation, tears streaming from his eyes, sobs issuing from his

burning throat. So far as the dog was concerned, Moony was incorrigible. If she was eating from a dish and would not allow him to share, Moony would stand off a few paces, then lying down he would roll up to her at terrific speed—usually clean over the dish, knocking the dog head over heels; then grabbing up a huge mouthful, he would climb into a tree ere she could retaliate, and there howl an imagined injury.

One day Jess bit Moony, whereupon he went outside and climbed to his usual perch in the maple, where he sat nursing his supposed injury and howling as though he had lost a limb. Suddenly an idea occurred to him, and he fell silent. For twenty minutes all was strangely peaceful, then Jess, having forgotten the cub, strolled outside at Bill's heels. As they passed under the maple a round ball of fur fell from the branches, and landed with a resounding thud on the poor dog's neck, knocking the breath out of her. Moony seemed to bounce a clean foot into the air from the impact, then in a moment he was back in the tree, looking down at them with his little mischievous eyes, and howling once more at the memory of his own injury. He was not vindictive—oh no!—but how he loved to take a rise out of Jess! And so, by degrees, Jess yielded in all things to his will.

Everywhere Bill went the cub followed, looking at everything Bill looked at, closely examining

everything Bill examined. He would stand up on his hind legs at Bill's side, peering into the gold-washing troughs as Bill hopefully examined their hopeless contents, for there was really no gold on Bill's claim, and in his heart Bill knew it. Moony's sole and only toy was an empty "evaporated milk" can, into the lid of which Bill had long ago punched two holes from which he had poured forth all the tin had to give. Bill attached a cord to the can, so that Moony could carry it, and the little bear carried it everywhere, as a child might carry a toy bucket.

Bill did his best not to overfeed the cub, as he wanted the little animal to learn to forage for itself, so that it would be in a better position when the day came that he would have to turn it loose in the woods. So Bill had made his decision, and when the autumn leaves began to drift earthwards, he knew that the time had come for him and Moony to part. All summer the little creature had enlivened his lonely life, and thus little Moony had surely fulfilled a worthy purpose—if only by adding one small draught to the cup of a lonely man's contentment. And Bill, taking the cub's little woolly head between his hands and looking into the little mischievous face which first had looked into his with such pathetic meaning, wished above all things that Moony would for ever remain a little cub.

Such things cannot be. Time changes all

things save, mercifully, the hope of human progress, and Moony was now big and strong. Even Jess, though she loved him, avoided those contingencies of will which in the early summer had added so much to the man's merriment of soul. "Moony, Moony, we'll have to part, old man," said Bill, and that morning the two travelled far by canoe, then by a blazed trail through the woods, till they came to a lonely little valley with high hills on either side—hills which few sportsmen crossed, and in the uppermost heights of which, incidentally, Bill believed there were untold riches in the way of gold.

Here Bill spent a whole day with little Moony. He led him down to the creek, and along the shores, till he found a dead sucker, which Moony ate. Then Bill went into the old timber, and tearing the bark from a dead tree, he exposed under it a host of insects which Moony's eager nostrils nosed out. Soon Moony was busy removing the bark for himself. Then Bill led him off again, and rolling over the logs in the cedar swamp he exposed the succulent slugs, while on the sandy stony levels Bill showed little Moony how to catch ants.

Moony, like all bears, was very short-sighted, and it was pathetically simple to give him the slip. Yet when Bill reached the height o' land, and heard his pet crashing hither and thither in the timber far below, calling with a frenziedness

new to Bill's ears, the man beat his strong fists together and once, twice he turned back, then, with eyes downcast, he went his way.

Yet as he reached home, what was that on the roof of the cabin? What were those sounds which smote his ears? Bill strode up eagerly, and there, of course, was Moony—Moony, having removed the tin extension from the chimney pipe, and now peering down with one eye into the cabin through the cavity left!

Bill spent the following day rejoicing, but during the cold still nights that followed, his conscience pricked him. It would be madness to face this northern winter in so lonely a place with a half-grown bear as cabin mate! So in due course Bill turned his face cityward, determined to sell Moony or give him away, and Moony faithfully followed him all the way there and all the way back again.

No, not quite all the way back, for within five miles of the cabin the first real blizzard of winter came. Goodness, how the ice particles flew with the approach of night, bringing blood to Bill's lips, and how the dead trees crashed to earth on every side! Bill broke into a run, for in those forests the peril of the falling timber is a great peril in such a gale as this, but ere the cabin was in sight something happened—he did not know what. He only knew that he was horribly cold, lying full length in the snow, face downwards,



MOONY FINDS HIS MASTER PINNED UNDER A TREE

both his legs held in a vice-like grip below the knees.

Bill struggled to free himself, but his first effort told him that, numbed as he was, escape was impossible. Peering round over his shoulder, he saw that a great tamarack tree pinned him. In the gathering darkness he must have run right under it as it fell, for he was held close to its roots. Luckily for him the pressure was relieved by a rotten log, almost alongside his legs, supporting much of the weight of the tree.

Horried though he was at his predicament, Bill's horrors for that night had scarcely begun, for now he saw Moony, the bear cub, slouching up to him, and apparently in an evil mood at having been kept waiting so long in the cold. With a growl Moony clutched Bill by the lapels of his canvas coat, and lying back, began to pull in fierce, strong snatches, till the garment gave way. Perhaps Moony was anxious for his master, but at all events Bill, contemplating events later, felt sure that it was only his own feverish fears which that night painted the cub as such a terrible monster. He recalled the story of Nodwell, the Indian, who had been killed by his own bear cub as he lay sick, and now, in his helpless predicament, it seemed to Bill that a fate of the same terrible kind awaited himself!

With numbed fingers Bill felt for his hunting knife, and finally he obtained possession of it. He struck fiercely and with intentness of purpose,

but so feeble was his grasp that the weapon fell from his fingers under a force insufficient to drive a clothes-peg home. Nevertheless Moony howled tremendously and quite needlessly, and in the absence of his old familiar tree, he climbed forthwith to the highest point there was.

It was then that Moony's condemning weight came in, for he climbed up the prostrate and newly fallen tamarack, balanced on the rotten log near to Bill's imprisoned legs, till little Moony tipped the beam. Up came the prostrate trunk, and Bill, seeing his chance, swung his legs clear ere it came down again. Next moment he was crawling away on all fours, and Moony, forgiving and forgetting, was ambling just ahead of him, rejoicing at his master's newly found and much superior manner of progression.

So the wind howled and the snowflakes flew, but when finally Bill staggered in, to be effusively greeted by Jess, he was alone. Many times next morning he called, but no response came across the whiteness. So Bill knew that little Moony, according to the custom of his kind, had sought out a snug bed under the snow with the coming of winter—knew that if ever again they met it would be as foes, or at the best as casual acquaintances. But they would not meet till the northward journeying star called Moony and all the gipsy race to which he belonged back to the world of sunlight and joy, which is the world of spring.

CHIPP, THE IDLER

A Jackdaw Thief

I

The bustle of the nesting season was long since past, the idle days that succeeded it were tailing away in the lingering kiss of the Indian Summer. Bright, sunny days these, with a crispness about them and a suggestion of frost—days of peaceful quietude, as though Nature were a little tired and well satisfied with what she had achieved during the season which really mattered.

But for all their seeming quietude, these were by no means idle days. The swallows were gone from the valley, the curlews were gone from the moor, but for a thousand thousand field and forest folk it was the Harvest Moon. There was bustle in the grass where the mouse colonies lived their lives unseen, there was a rustling in the leaves at the woodland edge where the grey-tailed squirrel garnered his nuts; while *Lutra*, the otter, was busy laying on fat while the salmon legions ran.

The jackdaw colony in the river cliff was perhaps most remarkable of all for its atmosphere of

“ something doing ”. Eight months ago a similar scene had taken place in that historic crag, and while his neighbours had flown back and forth, Chipp, the Idler, had stolen their sticks to build his nest and so saved himself the trouble of collecting sticks for himself. He was the thief of the colony, and every jackdaw colony has its thief. Now, while the others flurried to and from the cliffs, between neighbouring grove, field, and homestead, Chipp watched from the dark entrance of his home cranny. There was Colo, the weakling of the clan—the most disreputable jackdaw one ever saw. But Colo was honest, and now she was busily collecting walnuts from the rectory orchard, and carrying them one by one into her chamber directly above. Chip watched, and every time Colo flew off, his bright grey eyes would appear at the mouth of his cranny, and making sure no one watched, he would dart up to Colo’s shelf, to reappear a moment later with a nut in his beak. This he would store in the back of his own cranny, which already contained an untidy litter of crimson berries, a hazel or two, a mushroom, a bone-hard crust of bread, a bright buckle, and walnuts galore. Why bother to harvest for oneself when “ borrowing ” was so easy?

Colo evidently realized that something was wrong, for each time she reappeared from her cranny she looked more wild-eyed and ruffled. At length she flew straight off as though she were

going to the grove, disappeared among the trees, then cunningly circling the bluff she came straight back by a different route. She met Chipp just coming out of her own den with a walnut in his beak—caught him in the act, and went for him like a tenement cat!

“Chipp-churr! Chipp-churr!”

The sharp metallic notes echoed across the cliff and smote the laughing river a hundred feet below. The two met with a clatter of wings, the walnut fell between them and “pinked” to the rocks, bouncing and rebounding, till it fell with a tiny splash into the crystal stream below. Colo, buffeted and repelled, staggered and tumbled twenty feet or more, while Chipp darted like a startled rabbit for his cranny, and flung angry abuse at Colo from the mouth of it.

Such little incidents were of hourly occurrence in the jackdaw cliff, and Colo, having preened her feathers and partly forgotten her wrath, flew industriously off again, whereupon Chipp fluttered down to look for the nut they had dropped. And while the others flew back and forth, their store-rooms slowly filling with winter fare, Chipp wasted two precious hours of harvest time looking for the nut which really belonged to Colo.

II

The fleets of russet leaves that for many weeks had followed the foam flakes on the stream below

had ceased to drift, and the jackdaws in the white cliff above had each a bulging store on which to draw when the Frost King claimed the land. Each morning the colony split up into little parties which flew off in different directions, calling merrily to each other as they flew, and shortly after daybreak there was not a jackdaw left at the home crag—or rather only one. There he sat, day after day, in the topmost branches of the stunted mountain ash which grew from the face of the cliff, chipping the others as one by one they left him, or hurling mockery at Quask, the keen-eyed heron, who passed each morning from his fishing grounds just as the shadow of a certain larch fell across a certain white stone on the river bed below. Naked were the trees now, and often dusk brought a miserable drizzle which sighed with winter sadness among the alders.

Some people thought that Chipp was the sentry left to guard the bulging stores from the many furred and feathered folk who readily would have robbed them, but in truth Chipp stayed at home for reasons of his own. Why travel weary miles for food when there was all a body craved so near at hand? Chipp was no fool, for he was the fattest of the clan, and all his days were spent in lubbardly plenty.

But, seated thus on the topmost branch, the white cliffs behind him, Chipp in his sable robes was rather a landmark, and many there were who

knew him, coming in time to regard him as a natural feature of the landscape. Thus it was that, one day, he obtained a very bad fright.

I do not believe for a moment that the peregrine meant business. I believe that he did it solely for the fun of the thing, and in order to see Chipp hustle for once. Chipp had just hurled a scornful jest at a little band of starlings banking overhead when the starlings, for no obvious reason, dived as one bird head foremost for the river. It looked as though they were going to plunge straight in, but at the last moment they swerved, and flew rapidly on two inches above the surface.

“Churr!” muttered Chipp, shrugging his plump shoulders and puffing his feathers luxuriously, but at that moment a shadow fell on the white chalk cliffs, and looking up, Chipp saw the peregrine falcon coming straight at him with half-closed wings not fifty yards away!

Had a bullet suddenly ended Chipp’s career the effect could not have been more electrical. He simply fell head over heels, ricocheting from the branches, from the top of the tree to the brambles below. There he lay, gasping and huddled, while the falcon shot through the air where a moment ago he had sat, actually brushing the branch his claws had clasped, then volplaned and rocketed on into space.

Chipp remained hidden till the other jackdaws came home, then he crept miserably out and made

hastily for his den. And from that day on he never again took his seat in the ash, but instead he remained at the mouth of his cranny, watching white-eyed the world without.

III

Thus, while each day the other jackdaws ranged for food, each adding a little to its store while still there was plenty, Chipp stole when he could between intervals of sorting out the daintiest morsels from his own store. His store did not grow, if anything it diminished, but why trouble one's head when life was so easy and there were so many industrious people to do the work?

But the days of reckoning came. I saw it all with my own eyes, and I know that what I write is true. Morning awoke cold and dark, and the jackdaws, instead of flying off, sat silently and sadly about the cliffs, not even troubling to chaff each other. The hills were already white, and in an hour or so snow began to fall, till the whole bleak landscape lay under winter's feathery mantle. At midday it turned soft and rained a little. At dusk frost set in, and such a frost! It was the beginning of the long cold snap.

Did the wild folk know that it was coming? That I cannot say, but this I know—that all who were accustomed to storing food had a store laid by more abundant than usual. Some, indeed, had several stores, twice as much as they hoard

for a normal winter, and when hunger fell upon the land the wise were prepared.

During the days that followed, when the land was sealed beneath an icy mantle, the jackdaws of the river cliff remained at home—each one guarding its store. Sometimes little bands flew off, but always four or five remained to perch in the stunted ash and watch. And Chipp fared—not so well!

I fancy that repeatedly he tried to steal, but the other jackdaws watched him, and he was not popular. One day I saw four or five of them setting about him. They fell in a flurry of feathers to the river rocks below, and there, for a minute or more, there was a struggling heap of jackdaws, with one in particular at the bottom of the heap. Chipp sat for a while where they left him, miserably contemplating his misfortunes, then he picked himself up and straggled back to his cranny overhead.

There was no mistaking Chipp in these days. Where now was the brightness of his eyes and the lustre of his plumes? He looked threadworn and bedraggled. He was the dirtiest, wettest-looking jackdaw in the clan. His crumpled feathers clung to his bony frame with betraying accuracy. Somehow he had lost his tail, and I believe that he was starved. Even Colo looked respectable beside him. For the days had come when his own cranny contained only empty husks, and when

he could not steal from the others who still had plenty, because they watched; and Chipp, daily becoming weaker, found himself one dawn in mortal combat with Colo, the weakling.

How the fight began I do not know. I expect Chipp tried to steal from Colo, because Colo was notoriously weak. But Chipp was weaker now than Colo, and there, in the trampled snow at the foot of the cliff, they fought; while Lutra, the otter, looked on, wondering which would fall. For Lutra also was hungry.

Next day I saw Colo transporting her store to Chipp's empty cave, which was evidently a better one than her own, and so to the weakest of the clan fell what remained of the possessions of a thief. What became of Chipp I do not know, save that one day I happened to be on the moor when I saw a raven feeding on the carcass of a white hare in the peat hag. As I approached, the bird flew off, whereupon there appeared from the heather near, heedless of my presence, a tail-less jackdaw! It fell upon the raven's kill, feasting ravenously, while across the quietude rang the chime of Christmas bells, mocked at by the raven's deep sepulchral croak.

Thus with the greeting of the New and the symbol sound of death, Chipp passed out of our ken—stealing still, but with the scant honour of stealing from a thief.

MILDRED'S FOSTERLING

An Otter reared by a Duck

Mildred was a strange old duck. She had never cared much for the society of other ducks, and the giddy whirl of the farmyard was too much for Mildred. So the fact that Mildred chose always to live her life alone brought her before one's notice, for if at any time one saw a forlorn and sober-looking duck standing under the chestnuts or meandering aimlessly about the greensward, that duck was most assuredly Mildred.

One day it rained very heavily, and by evening the stream was full to its banks. The fact that Mildred did not turn up at sundown surprised no one, for during a flood it was not uncommon for the ducks to stray to the head of the waterfall some considerable distance below the farm. Had Mildred allowed herself to be drawn over the fall and dashed to bits among the crags below? Not much! The thought of such a calamity hardly occurred to the household, for Mildred had known the fall since her duckling days. No doubt her mother had warned her of its perils, for along with the other ducks she understood

quite well the folly of venturing too near its brink when the burn was running bank-full.

No, Mildred was about somewhere, and to-morrow morning no doubt she would come waddling steadily home.

A public footpath led through Abel Fletcher's farmyard, and the children of the neighbouring farm were accustomed to crossing the wooden bridge which spanned the stream on their way to and from school. The children it was who on the following morning found Mildred, and who conveyed the tidings of her whereabouts to Abel.

"I think she's sitting a clutch of eggs," they announced, "'cause she's awful fierce!"

So Abel sauntered up to investigate. Was Mildred, after all, a dark horse? Had she been slowly, solemnly accumulating the prospects of a family of her own?

Abel thought of Mildred, and dismissed the idea as frivolous. If indeed she was sitting a clutch of eggs they were certainly not of her own laying—she had appropriated them from someone else; but in all probability he would find her incubating a white stone or gravely sitting on a mushroom.

In a bed of wild garlic the old duck had settled herself, and as Abel approached she puffed out her feathers and struck at his fingers. Abel lifted her, and there beneath her lay a little

squirming atom, which at first he took to be a young kitten.

“Now, where on earth did she get that from?” Abel muttered, wondering, as well he might, what to do. He put the duck back, whereupon she at once settled herself over her adopted charge, and with an air of possession bade Abel go about his own affairs.

Just then the river-keeper chanced to be passing, and peering over the wall to see what it was all about, he was shown the fosterling.

“Know what it is, Abe?” he asked. “Why, it’s a young otter. Got separated from its mother owing to the heavy water. It isn’t uncommon for that to happen with otter kits, but fancy her mothering it! Fancy her taking to it like that!”

Abel looked helplessly at Mildred. “What am I supposed to do?” he queried. “She can’t bring it up, can she?”

“Of course she can’t,” replied the water bailiff. “You want to rap the wee varmint over the head and send the old duck home! What does she want monkeying about with otter cubs?”

But the hand of Abel Fletcher was ever reluctant to strike, and being in his way a keen naturalist, he was genuinely interested in the phenomenon. He wondered how things would pan out if the otter cub were kept alive with Mildred as foster-mother. His wife had raised all manner of strange orphans by dint of a feeding

bottle, and since Mildred was evidently prepared to provide the warmth and the mother love, there was no apparent reason why someone else should not provide the food. So, dropping the little otter into his pocket and poking Mildred under his arm, Abel went back to the house to discuss the matter with his wife.

A basket for Mildred and her charge was placed in the corner of the kitchen, but at first Mildred would not take to it. By nature's ordinary course her offspring should be ready to follow her almost immediately on birth, but quack and prod the otter kit as she would, that blind little sprawling atom was incapable of falling in with the rules of the duckling world. Thus Mildred eventually concluded that he needed more incubating, and settled herself down to hatch him out to a more interesting stage.

Mildred had never been what one might term a handsome duck, but after a few days with her new nursling she was reduced to a mere travesty of her former self. In a spirit of heroic martyrdom she had stripped most of the feathers from her breast to make a nest for the fosterling, and he, in his squirming efforts to discover that which simply did not exist, had removed the rest.

So, almost devoid of raiment, poor Mildred would waddle into the farmyard to snatch a hasty meal, blind, in her mother love, to her disreputable condition. The fowls looked at her with a

scandalized air, the ducks seemed frankly interested, but the drake, having peered at her once round the edge of a bucket, was seen to flee from the farmyard and to dive head foremost into the stream. Only the old brood mare, peering soft-eyed over the gate, regarded Mildred with an eye of sympathetic understanding, and one could almost hear her exclaim: "What, is that our old Mildred? Dear me, what a burden our children are!"

At the end of about a week Abel exclaimed one evening: "See here, Jessie, this won't do. The poor old duck isn't fit to be seen."

Mrs. Fletcher nodded gravely. "She sure is a sight for tired eyes," she assented. "I wonder she don't shame to show yourself."

"And what's more," Abel went on, "she ain't improving. She's losing more feathers every day."

The woman nodded. "I sweep up a panful every morning," she said.

Abel pondered awhile. "It isn't fair to her," he summed things up. "In a few days she'll have nothing left but her wing feathers, then she'll present a bonny spectacle. I shall have to lend her one of my waistcoats."

In the end the box containing the otter kit was fitted with a lid, and old Mildred showed herself quite content to sit on top of the lid.

Thus for seven long weeks this faithful, foolish

old duck stuck unwaveringly to her adopted child, for all that time elapsed ere the young otter opened its eyes to the light. It was by then a strong and vigorous cub, and the bottle had long since been abandoned, and the little creature was quite well able to squirm about and devour any morsels of food thrown to it. So one sunny August morning, in the presence of two newspaper men and the local naturalist, a strange spectacle was witnessed—an otter cub squirming across the farmyard at the heels of a ragged and disreputable old duck, who was heroically clearing the way for him, deaf to all the jibes and scandalized remarks of her acquaintances. What they thought of it there is no telling, for hitherto Mildred must have stood before them as a spotless character.

Not long was the otter content to follow at his foster-mother's heels. Soon it was he who led, and poor Mildred who was left to bring up the rear as best she could. Sometimes she lost him, and was seen strolling miserably about, quacking melodramatically. The otter cub's ideas were not Mildred's ideas, nor could she enter into or approve his sense of humour. His greatest joke consisted of turning in frolicsome mood and bowling poor old Mildred head over heels amidst a cloud of her own remaining feathers. At first she tried to exercise her authority by pecking at him and cuffing him with her wings, but this he seemed to regard as part of the show, and soon, when Mildred

saw him coming for her, she would turn and flee with more haste than dignity in the opposite direction. But such was the strength of imagined motherhood that when the otter cub turned about, Mildred would sprint after him no matter where he led.

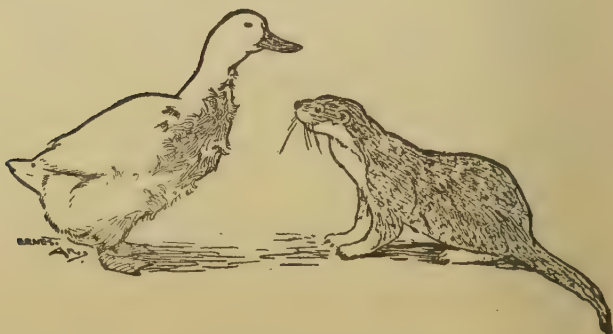
But the day came when one of the otter cub's journeys took him to the stream, and there he began to paddle about, while Mildred floated sedately a few feet away. At first the little otter seemed half frightened of the water, but soon he gave himself up to wild delight, and proceeded to dash at every floating bubble he saw. He dashed at poor old Mildred and completely capsized her, then he set off downstream, swimming, running, plunging, and Mildred set off after him. "Quack!" she cried, warning him that down there was the waterfall. "Quack, quack! If you don't mind, you'll fall over the edge into the pool below."

But the little otter took no notice whatever, and on he splashed and dashed—on, on, with Mildred floundering, quacking, flapping in pursuit—on, on to the very brink of the fall, then over and down and into the white smother of foam below.

To Mildred that was the end. In her tiny duckling days her mother had taught her that her world ceased at the edge of the fall. Beyond that lay the great unknown, and Mildred did not even go to the edge to look. Instead, she turned her

face homeward, while in the centre of the pool below the otter cub came up among the bubbles; but startled and mystified though he was, he did not pause to think. For this to him was the joy of life and freedom—away, away, to follow the silver river to the sea.

Thus they parted, and I think it was the very best thing which could have happened. I fear the cub, as he grew older, would sadly have abused his poor gentle foster-mother, for they could never have seen eye to eye in most things; and so he went his own blithe way, while Mildred returned to the quiet life of the homestead where she had lived since her fluffy duckling days.



THE PIT

A Dog's Thrilling Adventure

Tom Lee distinctly heard the scuffle in the jungle behind him, but he took it that his dog had disturbed game of some kind, and he rode on without heeding. It was after sundown, and he was anxious to reach his bungalow and dinner. A mile farther on, however, he realized that his dog was not following, so he drew rein and whistled, but of the terrier there was not the slightest sound.

Lee knew instinctively that something had happened, so he wheeled the pony in her tracks and cantered back to the point at which he had last heard the dog. Again he whistled and called, and this time he thought he heard a faint yapping and whining. It was muffled and strange, seeming to come from somewhere underground among the dense foliage away to his left.

Lee slipped from the pony, and began to part the undergrowth in the direction from which the sounds came, but he had not made twelve feet when he realized that more likely than not he would lose his bearings within sixty feet, which

might mean spending the night in that snake-infested blackness.

So he retraced his steps, deciding to go home and return at daybreak to search for the missing terrier.

The facts of the case were these: Mac, the white terrier, was ranging forty or fifty yards behind his master, when something came down from the branches head foremost, and had not Mac seen it coming, it would have pinned him to the ground, and so saved all the trouble. But Mac was quick, and the big spotted cat fell six inches short. The terrier's one thought was to get back to his master, but as he made a dive, the leopard bounded lightly to intercept him.

As Mac swerved, the apparently solid earth gave way under him, and accompanied by an avalanche of dust and rubbish, he fell a matter of twelve feet or more on to extremely solid ground. Moreover, the leopard fell with him, or rather a foot behind him, and they met at the bottom.

It was a man-made pit into which they had fallen, and cunningly made too, for wild cats had been attracting attention of late, and this was a pitfall for leopards or tigers. The pit was perhaps sixteen feet in length from end to end, and eight feet wide at the bottom, but it was dug in the shape of a quarter moon, so that nothing could take a straight run across the floor to leap out at the end. Also it was two feet wider at the

bottom than at the top, this to render escape still more difficult.

At all events, there they were, the terrier and the leopard, imprisoned together. For a minute or so the leopard bounded up and down, leaping and clawing at the earth wall, and rolling the yapping, terrified terrier over and over in her blind efforts to escape. Soon she learned that to get out was impossible, so she huddled in one corner, snarling at Mac as though she were terrified of him.

Now it was Mac's turn to try to find a way out, and hearing his master's whistles, he made his puny leaps again and again, yapping in his eagerness, but as the night wore on, Mac, too, realized that escape was out of the question, and his fear of the wild cat returned. He sank, shivering and exhausted, into the opposite corner from his fellow-prisoner.

Shortly after daylight began to show through the jagged hole in the roof of the pit, Mac again heard his master. Again he leapt and leapt, forgetful of the leopard, till he sank exhausted. But the men did not hear him, for their hearing was duller than his, and after a while they went away—concluding that a leopard had got the dog.

That day and the night following nothing of moment happened in the pit and each captive kept to its own respective half. Mac's half was dotted all over with the imprints of his feet,



the leopard's half was trodden smooth by her cushioned, heavy tread, and there was a distinct line down the centre where neither trod. At the breaking of the second morning, however, something did happen. A troop of monkeys found them, or rather, found the leopard, and in some way divined that she was a fixture there. At this their excitement knew no bounds.

Other monkeys gathered, and becoming bolder, they clustered round the hole and jibbered mockery at the wild cat glowering up at them from the gloom. But at length one of them leapt and alighted on a weak spot of the roof. So the monkey also came through, bringing an enormous quantity of the remaining structure with him, which had the desirable effect of letting in more light.

The monkey was surprised—so was his clan. All jibbering instantly ceased, and those above made for the trees. The one below lay just where

he had fallen. He stared at the leopard, which was snarling horribly, then he glanced at the dog, and seeming to make up his mind, he crawled slowly over to where Mac was, looking over his shoulder at the leopard as he went. At first Mac turned his face away and growled, but the monkey paid no heed, and two minutes later was crouching huddled against him, its head jammed into a corner under Mac's ribs.

The monkeys above had recovered from their shock to some extent. Scores of them could be seen in the branches, and their excitement had gathered flocks of brightly coloured birds, all of whom hated the leopard and were telling her so.

Mac was hungry, of course, but his thirst was awful. He had no voice left to make himself heard, and when he leapt he hardly left the ground. He might, of course, have slain the monkey, but luckily for him no such thought occurred to him. Had he begun the killing, the leopard most certainly would have carried it on. As it was, she was content to lie huddled in her own corner, regarding the dog and monkey as a part of the general fear which was upon her.

So the dreadful state of things endured, and still all day and every day the monkeys and the parrots chattered above. Hunger began to assail the occupants of the pit—hunger which crushed all fear, and left each of them too feeble to strike, even had it so desired. Even the boundary line

was now forgotten, for sometimes they walked up and down, passing and re-passing each other, brushing against each other as they walked. They no longer growled and snarled, because their tongues were swollen. Sometimes, when the leopard slept, curled up in a bony heap, the monkey would scramble over her to the highest point, looking up at the light, at which she would twitch her big ears as though a fly were troubling her, but otherwise make no movement. The sensations of cold came with their hunger, till the night dawned when the three of them huddled together, leopard, dog, and monkey, sharing the only thing which was left to them to share, their warmth.

That morning two men drew rein on the jungle path nearby.

"Hear that row?" inquired the younger, nodding towards the jungle on their left where a great screaming of birds and a chattering of monkeys was audible. "'That's going on every time I pass this place. I wonder what's exciting them?'"

The other smiled, and seemed disposed to dismiss the matter. "Drinking water, I suppose," said he.

"It was about here that I lost my dog," said Lee. "I just wondered if that might have anything to do with it."

The elder man swung round in his saddle.

"Of course it might!" he replied. "The dog may have fallen into a tiger pit or something. These blessed natives are always digging them, and never think of going round. We'd better investigate."

So the two left their ponies, and guided chiefly by the birds, they found the pit. It was the work of a minute or two to poke in the remaining portion of the roof, then they peered down. What a sight met their eyes! Directly below the three animals sat, side by side, looking up at them—the leopard big-eyed and fearless, the monkey with both hands half extended, Mac dull-eyed and drooping, though he managed to sum up the energy to wag his tail. The trodden floor of the pit, the clawed and broken walls, told their own story of the long and bitter struggle which had taken place.

"They've been in there together for days," the elder man said, "but if we tried to haul out the dog or the monkey, the leopard would go for it immediately she realized it was about to escape. The thing to do is to get the leopard out first."

They were not long in finding a fallen tree, and having trimmed off its branches they lowered it into the pit. The wild cat watched suspiciously, then, seeing the way out, she set her paws to mount. Slowly she came, testing every foothold, till she gained the brink, where both men stood back watching, their revolvers ready. She regarded them indifferently; then as the monkey scrambled

up behind her she snarled at him as he passed, and struck at him feebly with her forepaw as he dragged himself over the leaves. A minute later both were gone, then Lee lowered himself into the pit to save his dog.

Mac was all right in a few days, but there was this strange thing about it. Had he been a human being his hair might have turned white, but being white already, he achieved the best alternative. He shed his hair! Yes, every hair he had he shed, and a week later he was a hairless dog, which did not matter much because the weather was hot, though, of course, the flies troubled him. Yet a month later, he was covered all over with soft, luxurious down, and his new coat, when it came, was vastly superior in quality to the old one.



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